

# THE "ARGONAUTS"



*John Grotz*

Five young Americans discover their Country

## The "Argonauts"

WHEN five young people without any money are determined to explore the whole of America, how should they go about it? At the end of this volume future young explorers may find a valuable guide to sources of financial backing, which include a soft-hearted publisher. The publisher in this case believes that his investment was completely justified.

There were two girls and three boys, all just out of college, and all previously on the staffs of their respective college newspapers. They traveled over 15,000 miles in ninety-two days. You may call this a book of travel and reporting, if you like—it is that, but it is also much more. These five young "reporters," who poked into every nook and cranny on their route, and then wrote up their findings, saw more than our beautiful lakes, rivers, and mountains.

They saw *people*. They saw governors, mayors, labor leaders, Hollywood stars and "stand-ins," writers, captains of industry, sharecroppers, government officials, hoboes, and fellow-reporters. They asked *questions*. They asked frank questions, embarrassing questions, searching questions. They were census takers of American public opinion, conducting a sort of pint-sized Gallup poll. Without fear or favor, they probed the minds of their fellow-countrymen. And they found *answers*, some amusing, some serious, all with the unmistakable ring of truth.

Chock-full of adventure, discovery, unique experience, this book is as vital and alive as the fine young Americans who wrote it.

MODERN AGE BOOKS

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## THE "ARGONAUTS"



# THE "ARGONAUTS"

BY

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DESIGNED BY BRUCE GENTRY  
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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
TO THE MEMORY OF  
HELEN'S AND LILLIAN'S MOTHER  
WHO WILL ALWAYS BE AS MUCH A PART OF  
*The "Argonauts"* AS OURSELVES



Persons who undertake a long journey involving much hardship with a view to gain are called "Argonauts."

. . . And we were five who  
wanted to taste in real life  
what we knew only from books.



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## Chapter 1 JOURNEY TO THE MOON

☛ We had been going to school for fifteen years. Now we could read and write. Fifteen long and unfulfilled years of hope. . . .

*"Jason set out to search for the Golden Fleece . . ." our college professor's voice droned on.*

Our fifteen years never were measured, for we never measured time. We had learned to read and write, and we knew something about this land of ours. We liked some of the things we knew, and we knew some of the things we disliked.

*". . . Jason had to secure the Fleece in order that he might regain his stolen kingdom. . . ."*

Where was our kingdom of stolen opportunities?

Where was the America that could not be found in the textbooks? Where were the miners and lumberjacks, the cowboys and movie stars?

*". . . With the help of the goddesses Athene and Hera, Jason and Argus built a ship. Fifty of the foremost heroes of Greece joined the adventure. . . ."*

The fact that the textbooks had omitted the cowboys and the Pacific Ocean did not mean that the goddesses were going to help us find them. You need money to see America first—money for a car and for places to sleep and for food to eat. We didn't have any money.

*"Finally, the Argonauts reached Colchis, where the Fleece was guarded by a sleepless dragon. Medea, daughter of the King of Colchis, fell in love with Jason. She gave the dragon a sleeping powder. . . ."*

We had an assortment of diplomas, a batch of college newspapers we had edited, associate membership cards in the American Newspaper Guild and a strong desire to write and to earn a living.

*"Jason seized the Golden Fleece. . . ."*

We wanted to find America. Joe, Lillian, George, Helen and Mel—we were only five of 21,200,000—the nation's youth. In another month Joe would be nineteen years old. Summer meant a long, dreary vacation, meant listening to the family's incessant question: "Why don't you get a job?" They didn't understand that a college sophomore six feet tall with a baby face and too big for his only suit had tough competition. Would he never get a break? What did America have to offer?

George was different. Deliberately and methodically, he planned his opportunities. Twenty years old and a month out of college, he *belonged*, just as in school he had always known he would fit into the jam sessions and football games. Big and hulking, he knotted his red-striped necktie carefully in front of the mirror, thinking how well it would strike the eye. "America, here I come!" He grabbed his hat, packed his clothes and kissed his girl friend good-by.

With a deep sigh of relief, Lillian placed her new college diploma in a drawer and swaggered out to find her hard-

boiled newspaper idols. They belittled the diploma, but they liked the stocky swagger, and the curly mop of hair that went with it. "So you want to write! First get out and see the country!" Solid and persistent, Lillian immediately began the plans to get out and see it.

Lanky and shy, Mel brought all his books home one day and said Ohio University had refused to continue giving him a college education on credit. Every night he visited his lanky and shy girl friend and talked about the future. What future? She was a swell girl and the only one for Mel, but at twenty-two any guy knows you can't "live on love." How was it with other young people in the country? How many doors had America closed on its youth?

Helen had tried to work during the day, go to school at night and write for labor papers in between. Her soft sweet face looked tired. She *was* tired—"tired of working in stuffy offices, tired of serving greasy plates of spaghetti to nasty women, tired of fitting size five shoes on size seven feet!" Her eyes always crinkled, but her face showed no smile. Her sister Lillian didn't know yet what it meant to work for a living. But Helen knew, and now she wanted to see America's people at work.

Five of 21,200,000, we wanted to find our America, to see how it looked and to learn how we fitted into the picture. Book critic Lewis Gannett bought us a beer and said why don't you write a book? Naturally. Every roaming reporter from Homer to Steinbeck had done it. We could do it too. Publisher Louis P. Birk, soft-spoken and understanding, thought so.

". . . Modern Age, therefore, is willing to advance the small sum of fifty dollars as a starter when you leave on your trip West, and when you send us two or three chap-

ters of the proposed book, in fairly finished form, we will advance additional sums of money on the basis of our judgment as to the value of your writing. This is our gamble. . . ."

Like a family facing the first of the month without funds for the rent, we scurried around for more money and a car. We emptied our penny banks. We withdrew the last of our scholarship money—for a *real* education! We button-holed all our friends and made them bring their friends to a "rent party." Everybody had a terrible time. We were too busy counting money and raffling off books to entertain the guests. Then we visited uncles whom we hadn't seen for eight years and renewed acquaintances with fourth cousins. We began these visits by inquiring anxiously about their health and ended by asking hopefully for money. The Newspaper Guild had contributed one hundred dollars to our gradually growing fund, so that the associate members might be represented at the annual convention in San Francisco. But this was not enough to get us there.

With glum and worried faces, we sat around the Newspaper Guild Club counting the dollars over and over again. "I want to tell you something," began Helen slowly. "I've got a hundred dollars."

"WHAT?"

"Uh-huh. I've been saving it for years to do something I really wanted." Her eyes laughed and crinkled in the corners. "America is that something."

"Happy," the bartender at the Guild Club, had a plan. "Why don't you buy a new car on the installment plan?" He explained how it could be done.

Our friend Gladys wanted a car, and we convinced her that she needed us to break it in for her. We made the down payment. The shiny black four-door Plymouth was

delivered late at night, July 14. We named it the "Twentieth Century Unlimited."

July 15. Bulging valises, portable typewriters, gasoline stove, fishing pole, blankets, a mascot Dopey doll, cameras, tin dishes, canned goods, copy paper and a hatchet were packed into the car. Mel sat cramped in the driver's seat, his long legs bent so that his knees brushed the steering wheel. The gear shift was stiff, the brakes tight with all the newness of a car that had registered hardly forty miles.

Lillian and Helen's mother, a lovely white-haired woman, came downstairs to say goodbye.

"Be careful," she said.

"Don't worry about us," said Helen.

"No," said her mother, "but write home every day."

Forward!

"Well, now let's get organized," declared Lillian briskly, as we drove through familiar Prospect Park toward the Manhattan Bridge. "I suggest we elect various departments to manage the work on this trip. Who's going to handle the money?"

George had a degree in business administration. He had studied accounting and bookkeeping, and he knew how to pinch pennies. We had to be five on a fussy budget.

"All in favor of George for the Finance Department, please say aye."

"Aye!" said George, Mel, Helen, Joe and Lillian.

Mel was the only one who had a driver's license. So we elected him Travel Department—caring for the car, planning our routes, packing and unpacking luggage. . . .

If we were going to "cover the country," we would need an efficient City Desk Department.

"I nominate Lillian," said Mel.

Elected by acclamation, Lillian immediately passed out long sharp copy pencils.

"Food and lodging," drawled George. "That calls for a woman's touch." He looked meaningfully at Helen.

"But I can't cook!" protested Helen.

"That's all right," said Mel. "We've got enough canned goods for a week."

Helen paused, then said, "Well, I know how to use a can opener."

That settled it. We elected her Food and Lodging Department.

"What'll I be?" asked Joe. "I'm the only one left."

"Library Department," said Lillian. "We'll want to keep newspaper clippings and research material and stuff."

Joe hesitated.

"All those in favor of Joe?"

He was elected. From that point on, we decided everything by a democratic vote.

"Dig in, George," said Mel, "we're coming to the Tunnel."

"How much is it?"

"Half a buck."

"Is it agreed by the group that we spend half a dollar to cross the Hudson River?" George asked pompously. We agreed. George handed two quarters to Mel, drew out a small brown notebook and marked:

*Expenses for July 15*

Holland Tunnel..... 50¢

## *Chapter 2* EVERYTHING FOR INDUSTRY

☛ “Gee, at last I’m out of Brooklyn!” Joe pointed to the NEW JERSEY sign halfway through the Holland Tunnel.

As we came into the open, a bright green billboard greeted us.

EVERYTHING FOR INDUSTRY

MAYOR FRANK HAGUE

Helen turned to glance back at the sign. “I wonder what that means?”

“It’s just a rah-rah touch,” George declared knowingly. “Like ‘everything for deah old Yale,’ you know, ‘Boola-boola, boola——’”

“It means you can run your business more profitably

here," Mel interrupted, speaking quietly, without turning his dark eyes from the road. "My dad once wanted to bring his print shop to New Jersey, because labor and other expenses were cheaper."

Lillian took out a new notebook and on the first page wrote: "Everything for Industry?" She frowned importantly.

Mel crooked his arm on the window as we crawled toward Philadelphia at thirty miles per hour, the top speed allowed for a new car. Trucks, tin lizzies, home-made trailers, streamlined roadsters and even motorcycles whizzed past us. When we managed to pass a limping relic of an auto we shouted triumphantly, "Why don't you get a horse?"

We felt good. Everything had worked out fine. Gladys expected to get her car back good as new, because Mel, quiet and calm and capable, had told her so. You knew to look at him that he wouldn't ever forget grease or oil. We weren't worrying for the moment about money, although we were to be plenty worried before we had been to San Francisco and back. We weren't worrying about food because beaming parents had poked eggs and canned beans and cookies into the corners of the car.

We felt more than good. We were going to see our country. We knew we belonged to it, but how and where we were not sure. We knew some of the things we wanted to see. Young people first of all. Were they like us? Were any of them sure of how and where they fitted into their country's life? We wanted to ask them about the things in which we believed.

We were all stubborn about some of our beliefs, but we were not at all stubborn about the methods to achieve them. We believed that people shouldn't step all over each other

and push the little fellows into dark corners. We knew that people could work together and for each other; we five were experimenting with this belief in starting out together to cover the country. We believed in specific things, like unions. We belonged to one, the American Newspaper Guild, and were proud of it. We believed in general things—like freedom, not autocracy; peace, not war; goodness of human beings, not evil.

We wanted to see how people lived and worked in America and what happened when they didn't have work. We had read a lot of statistics about America, and now we wanted to see what they proved. We wanted to understand our country.

Joe, the youngest, eagerly took notes on everything, his blond round head poked out the window as a sign to the people of the state that he was not going to miss a thing about them. Sure, he had his prejudices about life, but he aimed to take a complete and objective look at America. The rest of us talked about the days and hours to come. George began a refrain we were to hear many times.

"We've got to save money. We're on a five-dollar-a-day budget, excluding the costs of the car, and we have to economize." He spoke emphatically, with the authority of one experienced in high finance. "The first economy measure is the little item of cigarettes. I brought my cigarette machine. We'll roll our own."

He produced a sample. Lillian tried it and moaned. Out of the daily appropriation, two dollars and a half would be spent on lodging. The other half of the sum would cover food, postage, cigarettes and other miscellaneous items. Eventually Lillian would learn to appreciate corn silk wrapped in tissue paper.

We rode into Philadelphia with a chip on our shoulders.

We knew all about big cities. We came from one. As soon as we stopped near an automobile supply store (we needed a baggage rack), Joe rushed out of the car.

"Hey, Joe, where are you going?"

"Want to interview some people. Philadelphia is an important spot."

Lillian meanwhile turned the back seat of the Twentieth Century Unlimited into a miniature "city room." She opened one of the typewriters and arranged a stack of copy paper on the small ledge under the rear window. She made notes of people to see between Philadelphia and Chicago and wrote letters informing them of our coming. Helen suggested subtle phrases that might bring food and lodging results. We would arrive late at night, hungry, tired, etc., etc.

Lillian pulled out the NAMES book.

Jay Franklin, Washington columnist  
Blue Ridge Summit, Pa.  
Friend of publisher  
Lunch . . . maybe

Cleveland:

George's Aunt Gussie  
Newspaper Guild  
Bert Foster, automobile worker  
food, beds, etc. . . . a cinch

The NAMES book was our key to the country. Food and information—the NAMES could give them to us.

Paoli, Malvern, Coatesville, Black Horse, Paradise, Bird-in-Hand . . . names on the map, they moved by in slow procession, cluttering the road to the West. The farms of central Pennsylvania spread their colors before us. The red

oats, green corn, dark brown earth, gray Old Dutch homes and huge orange barns plastered with purple "Mail Pouch" ads marked a pattern on central Pennsylvania. After a while we anticipated the uniform repetition of the colors, as we might acknowledge a familiar print on an old dress. The large billboard advertisements were ugly ornaments on the dress. Signs warned us to have faith in the coming of Christ, to shave with Burma, to travel next time by railroad and to drink Coca-Cola.

The sun was hot. We took off our coats and rode toward the golden sky. We wondered why people lived in crowded cities when all this beautiful land was available. The valleys were picture postcards made real. The soft hills walled in the beauty, hiding it from the surrounding towns and cities.

Lancaster was the center of this "garden spot of America." We felt the timeless dignity of the town in the old stone houses, in the large thick trees lining the streets.

Eddie Wagner, head stock boy at the five-and-ten-and-up store, proudly told us about his home town. It was big to Eddie, always would be big, as long as he stayed in Lancaster.

"Most people here," Eddie said quietly, "work in the big factories—Armstrong Linoleum, Hamilton Watch and the others. They worked straight through the depression."

"Sure, they have unions here," Eddie answered our question. "But not in my place. There's a fellow who lives in my row. He started the strike at Armstrong's. Got the workers a five-dollar raise. They fired him, though, after things quieted down. Now he can't get a job. Gee, he's smart. He can name you every star in the sky."

Eddie's supper hour was almost up, and he hurried back to work. We too thought of supper.

"I'm hungry. Let's eat up to forty cents apiece." Joe was always hungry.

"Thirty-five cents should be enough," Helen proposed timidly.

We voted.

Satiated with forty cents' worth of chicken croquettes and succotash, we walked down Main Street. Saturday night. People piled out of trolley cars into the square. Lines formed to the right at the movie houses. Girls and boys self-consciously walked by arm in arm. The Amish master farmers, who took oaths to none but God, strolled stiffly, their eyes straight ahead. They had labored and prospered on the farmland. Their ancient horse and buggy outfits still brought them into town. Their ancestors had come here more than two centuries ago. Clutching at the old way of life, even in their dress, these hard-working farmers seemed lonely and forgotten. We stared at the full-bearded man with clean-shaven upper lip wearing a tight, black suit and shoestring bow tie, and at his wife dressed in a large gray bonnet and gingham to the ankles. The Amish lived frugally and were confirmed pacifists. The picture shows had caught up with them. While some still owned the richest farms, many had deserted their profitless land; had come into town to work; and had sent their bony, angular daughters into the factories.

Helen and George entered a chain store grocery to buy coffee and bread for the next morning's breakfast. The others found a sandwich-sign man on the corner. Old and toothless, he mumbled to himself as he gave Mel a hand-bill. He looked surprised when Mel talked to him.

"I was in the last war," he nodded, "and this is what I got out of it. Some of 'em became millionaires, but I

couldn't even get a job. Nobody wants to hire a war-shocked old man."

He paused and handed some circulars to a group of young boys. . . . "New roller skating rink, everybody welcome. . . ." the circular said.

"My son's in the army now," he continued. "What can you tell a strong healthy boy, out of work for three years, who has to come to his daddy for carfare?" He examined us carefully, pushing his wrinkled face close to ours.

"It's fine to have you listen to me. Lots of young ones don't care to listen. But I know more than you'd guess." He shuffled away, chuckling.

Helen and George returned, loaded with bundles.

"Peanut butter!" George pointed knowingly to the package. "It's good for the digestion. Contains all the essential oils and stuff."

Joe scowled. "Didn't you get cereal?" he demanded. "I've got to eat cereal every morning. My father said so."

"Too bad. You're living with us now."

Helpful hints, garnered from friends and family, were followed more carefully. Inspect the tourist cabins before registering, we had been warned. Helen gingerly picked up the bed covers, looked under the pillows, and tested the mattresses. Then she inspected the washrooms.

"How much?"

"Two and a half," the scrawny manager replied mechanically.

"Okay."

Mel started to unpack the baggage. People drifted out from other cabins to watch our growing pile of belongings on the lawn. They gaped.

"You got all that in your car? Gosh almighty, I hope my wife doesn't see this!"

The girls bolted their cabin door and lowered the shades.

Mel, Joe and George squeezed into one narrow bed in the other room. George placed our treasury under the pillow and the hatchet on a small table near the bed.

We slept.

## 2

Breakfast—home-made Sunday breakfast—prepared on the gasoline stove. Three cents' worth of gasoline boiled the coffee and fried the bacon and eggs. We chewed dry crusts of bread for more than an hour before the stove finally came through. The greenish coffee tasted watery; the bacon was burnt, the eggs cold. But we were proud of this first breakfast. After all, none of us could cook. George took his turn at the dishes. When Helen went to investigate, she found him spraying the tin plates with a garden hose. She banned that time-saving device immediately. Maybe she couldn't cook, but she at least knew how to wash dishes.

*The Lone Ranger Rides Again* was billed at the Strand as we drove through Gettysburg.

Uniformed guides offered to show us around the battlefields.

"See where ten thousand men died," one barked.

No, thanks. Men had planted neat corn patches amidst the gray monuments and crosses—food for the living, lifeless stone for the dead.

Six youths in an open model T passed us and waved. Their wheels shimmied and rattled, and they waved baseball hats as they sang: "*Wishing will make it so, just keep on wishing . . . wishing will make it so . . .*"

We took up the song and climbed the curving road to Blue Ridge Summit, on a blue Pennsylvania mountain.

Jay Franklin, newspaper columnist and political commentator, awaited us. He had returned recently from a trip around the country, and we had called him for an appointment. Maybe he could give us some ideas about people and things to see.

We put on our best manners and hoped we would not appear awkward or amateurish. Franklin, our first "important national interview," looked at our bright car, freshly pressed suits, clean notebooks and long copy pencils. He smiled faintly. After a few weeks of being with America and her people, we were to reach the stage where Helen, the most timid of us all, would pat a mayor's wife on the back as she made flippant remarks about her ducky bonnet. But as we followed Franklin into his house, we breathed uncomfortably until we found firm support in five tall-backed chairs grouped around the table.

"I don't know if there's much I can tell you." Jay Franklin pointed to the large map of the United States which we had spread out on the table. "Just look, inquire and form your own opinions about things. Don't start out with preconceived notions about this country, because you're in for a surprise."

His serious expression changed to a smile, a wise smile, in character with his heavy-rimmed glasses and quiet black suit.

"What did you find out on your trip, Mr. Franklin?"

"The most important thing I found out, and I think you will too, is the economic basis of sectionalism. . . ." We looked at each other. "You'll see," Franklin explained, "how the lives of the people in any one section of the country are inextricably tied up with the economic resources of that area."

"We saw a sign in New Jersey," Lillian declared. "'Everything for Industry' it said. . . ."

"That's the idea," Franklin quickly added. "From New York to Chicago, you'll see how industry affects and directs the lives of people. Of course, you'll have to determine for yourselves whether or not *everything* is for industry."

"Good luck!" He waved as we started down the steep mountain side.

"Wasn't he a grand guy?" Helen placed her notebook on the "desk" under the rear window.

Mel turned the wheel sharply as we swung around curves.

"That's how really great people are," Lillian declared seriously. "Nothing false or pretentious about them. Only the phonies are snobs."

Joe wrinkled his forehead. "But what did he mean by 'surprises' in store for us? Suppose we don't see everything? Then we'll get a wrong picture of the whole country."

"We just can't generalize, that's all." George, in the back seat, placed his feet out the side window. "We can't generalize about the particular things we see unless we're absolutely sure they represent the typical."

At Waynesboro, a few miles away, we began to learn what Jay Franklin had meant.

"Hey, what street is this?" we called to a group of boys standing on a corner.

"Main Street! Whady'a think?"

"This is the country's biggest industrial city for its size," a small restaurant owner told us. "Our population is 10,000. About 6,000 used to depend on work in the factories. There's not a single union in town. We had a general strike back in

1919, and they put about a hundred strikers in jail. They didn't get me. I left town. Everybody's still afraid."

Everything for Industry?

As we returned to the car, a group of dirty-faced, uncombed children watched us silently from the curbstone. Their bare feet rested on the hot asphalt. We turned our eyes to the church steeple, over which the tree-studded blue mountains, lovely and serene, swept up toward the sky.

We twisted through the Alleghenies. The curving road changed into a straight white line, dark forest on both sides. In the dusk, it looked like the long straight part in a woman's sleek, black hair.

Suddenly, we found ourselves out of the green mountain land. The transition into Pittsburgh surprised us. Tall brick chimneys stood in military rows, emitting blots of black smoke that blended with the night. Spasmodically, a fiery glow to one side of the city would illumine the sky and die. Smoke dust—at first we thought it was fog—substituted for air. The giant Westinghouse plant sprawled below us, dark and solid.

"Schenley Park," a sleepy drugstore clerk advised, when we asked about tourist cabins. As we entered the park, a car pulled up alongside.

"Where are you going?" a gruff voice asked.

"To the tourist cabins. We're from New York."

"Follow us," the voice commanded.

We were uneasy, but we obeyed. We climbed after the other car. On the hilltop, deserted and dark, we stopped. George clutched the hatchet as a man approached.

"Looking for a place to camp?" the man called. "This is a good camping place. You can pitch your tent right here."

He was a policeman. We had everything except a tent. We spent the night in cabins outside of Pittsburgh.

## 3

Five persons in an over-stuffed car, and we wanted company. After a twenty-mile stretch through West Virginia had added another state to our growing collection, we felt like veterans of the road. A young boy standing near a rainbow pottery stand hailed us. His name was Nelson Dallas. Would we take him into Cleveland? He squeezed into the front seat, and we bombarded him with questions. He had a fifteen-dollar-a-week job in an amusement park. No, he hadn't finished high school. What's the sense in learning the same old stuff over and over again?

"The truant officer is supposed to come after you, but too many kids have to quit and get jobs. The police can't catch up with them," said Nelson.

"Five hundred miles," Mel broke in authoritatively. "Got to have the oil checked."

We left Nelson at his amusement park near Cleveland and headed for the city. "My Aunt Gussie will treat us fine," George assured us. "We don't have to worry about anything in Cleveland."

We didn't have to worry. When we rushed into Aunt Gussie's neat one-family house, she rushed out—but only to buy some food. Five extra for dinner was a bit of a surprise. She returned struggling with five bundles almost as big as she was. Bubbling over with worries about how we ate and slept, she fed us, as if it was the most important task she would face in the next two centuries.

Aunt Gussie didn't want us to go traipsing around town that night. All the relatives were coming over, and how often did she get to see George anyway? Relatives were all right, but that was not our reason for coming to Cleveland. We took Cousin Hilda along—Aunt Gussie's youngest and

still unmarried problem—and started to search for the Cleveland newspapermen. We found them—until two in the morning.

Don Pond, slight of build and short of temper, insisted on buying drinks.

"What'll you have, scotch, rye, rum . . . ?" he asked.

"Beer," Mel said, and Joe and George nodded.

"Sherry," said Helen.

"Scotch," Lillian requested in her most professional manner.

Pond ordered. "Now . . . you want to know about industry in Cleveland. Hah! We've got one helluva situation here. Labor is split in Ohio. The CIO backs one political candidate, and the A. F. of L. backs another. Result?" He held out his hands, palms up. "We've got a conservative Republican, Governor Bricker, who claims he's running the administration like a 'good business enterprise.' And what's he doing? Slashing appropriations for schools, relief and everything else!"

"There's dynamite in this town," Ted Cox, editor of the *Union Leader*, the city's labor paper, put in abruptly. "Some day it's going off, and somebody will have to be responsible for setting off the spark."

"If you want to see some of the dynamite," Pond suggested, "come out to the Fisher Body picket line at six o'clock tomorrow morning. Thirty strikers were sent to the hospital this morning after a row with the cops."

At 2:30 A.M. Hilda took Helen and Lillian to a friend's house across the street. Aunt Gussie piled blankets on the three boys in her spare bedroom.

"Strike, strike, strike," grumbled Aunt Gussie, giving each of them an apple. "Did you come to Cleveland to get your heads broken?"

George peeked sleepily from under the covers and blew her a big kiss. "We're looking for the economic basis of sectionalism." He bit into the apple and sighed.

Alarm clocks punctured our dreams at five. Mel tiptoed out to Aunt Gussie's front porch and waved the flashlight in the dark as a signal to the girls. Rain! We slipped into raincoats and rubber-soled moccasins and followed Pond's directions to the three-acre General Motors plant. The large gray buildings surrounded by a high wire fence seemed to go with the drizzling morning. Policemen paraded everywhere—on foot, atop horses, inside cruise cars.

About sixty men and women walked in the line before the gates of the plant; their collars were turned up to keep off the cold rain, but they held their heads high. A thin woman clad in a baggy green sweater carried a baby girl as she walked with the strikers.

Lillian spied Bert Foster, blond, diminutive leader of the United Automobile Workers Union, whom she had met at the American Youth Congress in New York a few weeks before. He moved up and down the picket line, giving directions, arguing with the police. Lillian wondered at the change in the flippant, lighthearted fellow she had taken to Coney Island. She remembered how he had wondered at the sword swallower in the freak show but had scornfully compared the roller coasters with the bigger ones in Cleveland. They had played the rabbit race and won the Dopey doll—now our mascot in the car.

Wearing a red turtleneck sweater and corduroy trousers, he shook hands and grinned at an equally smiling Lillian. "Now it's my turn to entertain you," he said. "C'mon, get on the picket line."

We got on the line. Lillian paired off with a brown

young seaman, Helen with a large Hungarian toolmaker, Joe with a stocky Irishwoman, George with a dark little Italian, Mel with another tall and wiry youth.

"The cops can't hurt us more than the sight of our hungry kids. . . ."

". . . Don't want nothin' except to live decent. . . ."

". . . The neutral police . . . what a laugh! . . ."

*"A scab goes through the picket line,  
A man stays out; he's got a spine!"*

"I like to be out where there's laboring people. I'm one of them, and proud of it. Their fight's mine." Dressed in soiled khaki trousers, Roy Sjodin, son of farm folks in Minnesota, kept step with Lillian as the line moved slowly by the gates. He belonged to another union, the National Maritime Union.

"You in a union?" he asked. Lillian said, in a matter of fact way, "Sure, the American Newspaper Guild."

Roy smiled. "That's a good union."

Suddenly a man shouted, "Scabs! They're comin'."

Mounted police in their white raincoats, like Arab marauders in the silent Valentino films, rode into the picket line. Foster and other strike officials stood before the scabs' car, asking them to go back. The police tried to clear a path for the car. Steel workers blocked the way, their steel-tipped shoes protecting them from the horses' hoofs. Workers pushed us to the rear of the crowd. "Be careful, girlie, you'll get hurt. We know how to go about this."

George raised his camera to take a picture of a policeman swinging at heads. The policeman saw him and swung at George with his lead-weighted club. Someone pulled George back. "Look out, kid, get back."

Another scab car drove up to the gate. "Butch," the fifteen-year-old union mascot, jumped on the running board. He drove his hand through the window into the driver's face. The police searched wildly for a picket with a bloody, glass-cut fist. But the boy kept his hands in his pockets and hid in the crowd.

At eight o'clock the picket line laughed. Eight scab cars were parked in the yard which accommodated ten thousand during normal operations. Bert Foster smiled happily and said, "Let's get some breakfast." He led us into the strike kitchen, in a cellar across the street. Clean oilcloth covered the long narrow tables. Husky workers in aprons poured coffee and served cereal and rolls, while others washed dishes for the new shifts.

Bert Foster gulped his coffee. "Got to hurry to court. Arrested on a disorderly conduct charge. You know, bosses' method to get rid of strike leaders." He smiled bitterly. "So long. See you again."

Roy Sjodin took us to the quarters of the twenty seamen who had come from Toledo to show their support of the strike. Two large rooms in a former brothel, pictures of nude women on the wall, ten bare cots in each room. Roy waved his hand and bowed. "Our royal suite, folks."

So we took leave of Cleveland and the automobile strike. We had met industrial workers, people solid and good. We liked them for their simplicity and courage. On the picket line we had not felt afraid because they had no fear.

We had not, as Aunt Gussie seemed to believe, gone out looking for a strike, but we were glad we had seen one. We saw that the lives of these people depended on an industry, and an industry that could be heartless.

Two weeks later, in California, we read that the automobile workers had won the strike.

## 4

Indiana looked fat and green. We thought we had reached the West, the real m'coy, and we wanted to talk to a farmer. We found him in a gas station, helping his friend. He had his troubles. Harvest was coming on. He needed twenty dollars to hire a combine, and he didn't have twenty dollars. He couldn't borrow any more money from the bank or grain-elevator man. Was this slight, middle-aged man in grease-stained overalls the American farmer? Was his problem the "farm problem"?

"If it was up to the farmers, we wouldn't ask for gov'nment help. 'Tain't easy to kill yer best hog and bury him under the eyes of a gov'nment man, when you know there's people a mile down the road that needs food."

"How does the government help?" Helen was puzzled.

"Well, the farmers can't get a price on the market nowadays. The gov'nment says there's too much food growin'. So they stop us from raisin' stuff by payin' us. See?"

We saw. We had memorized "the law of supply and demand" in our economics courses. But now it was a little confusing. There was demand in the faces of hungry people. There was supply in the rich farm fields of Ohio and Indiana. But demand without money was not demand.

"Goin' into Gary?" A tall youth dressed in a flashy green suit waved the car to a halt after we had left our farmer.

"I'm from Texas," he announced as soon as he was seated. "From the Bar X Ranch. I ran away." He gave us a forced, jolly-good-fellow smile, showing two front teeth missing.

"Are you one of the Bar X boys?" George asked. "I read about you ten years ago. All the kids in the Bronx read those stories."

Texas, our companion continued unabashed, was a thoroughly Republican state. He had ridden buckin' broncos, just like the subway trains in New York City. He entertained us with adventure stories about chasing cattle rustlers, beating up the Capone gang in Chicago and attending "Purdue University in Kansas" for a year. He shrugged at our surprised faces. Joe fondled the hatchet and George his pocket knife.

"That's nothing," he declared, "I earn forty dollars a day sometimes. All I have to do is slug those CIO skunks who make all the strikes."

He got out at Gary. We wondered if he would find any work "slugging" here.

The Carnegie-Illinois Steel mill stretched over the central part of the city. Gary lived on steel. Traffic moved slowly around the plant, and workers congregated in little groups near the curbs. Everything was steel, Carnegie-Illinois steel, in Gary, a young waitress explained. When the mill worked, people ate, went to movies and bought clothes. When the mill closed down, people waited for it to open again.

Only half the people in Gary were working, and at that only three days a week. The steel workers were trying to get the City Council to do something about the unemployment problem. Most of the young people in the plants belonged to the union. But with the mill working at only 40 per cent, the older men were given preference.

We went into the street to compare notes. Jobs? Two young fellows on their way home from business school answered the question politely.

"Jobs are scarce."

They were going to business school, hoping their additional training would help. But there weren't many jobs

outside the mill. They had combed the city for work since their graduation from high school two years before.

Two young Negro girls standing near a jewelry counter in Woolworth's had the same story to tell. "A job is the thing you want most, but it's the hardest thing in the world to get."

Carnegie Steel was big and important; it reached into many continents. Carnegie endowed libraries in which we had read and studied. But the workers in Gary never used those libraries; their children never went to college.

"Everything for Industry . . ." Lillian mused.

"You mean *everything* for industry," Helen corrected. "That's the way it looks."

Chains of factories and hamburger stands marked the twenty miles from Gary to Chicago. We felt all-knowing and prepared for anything in Chicago. Lake Shore Drive into the city reminded us of our own Riverside. Tall, snooty apartment houses faced the water. Tan boys and girls in tight bathing suits played on the beach.

As soon as we had parked the car, we made directly for Texas Guinan's old night club, a remembrance of things past. At the entrance hung a large sign: HEARST STRIKE HEADQUARTERS—only the present mattered there now. The old red and gold decorations were covered with notices: "Strikers Due on Picket Line Today," and "Excuses Don't Win Strikes," and "Hearst Papers' Drop in Advertising."

Yes, another strike, but one we had known of and helped from afar by collecting funds from students and refusing to buy products advertised in the struck papers.

We entered and stared. Copy boys were painting signs. Reporters were turning out leaflets. Rewrite men were seated around a circular desk getting out stories on the

strike. A circulation manager was cutting a sports writer's hair. Sob sisters prepared the "strike lunch" at the bar.

"Hello. We're associate members of the Newspaper Guild of New York," said Lillian.

Harry Wohl, his shirt sleeves rolled up, a bedraggled tie hanging carelessly from his limp, loose collar, shook hands with us. "So you want to walk on our picket line? Okay. Tomorrow morning."

"Okay."

"Got a place to sleep tonight?" he queried.

"Not yet."

"We'll put you up," he said, smiling.

We wandered about headquarters, discovering strike facts. The strike had already cost the Hearst management \$8,000,000. It was the longest and largest white-collar strike in American labor history. More than 500 newspapermen on both Hearst papers in the city refused to go back to work unless their demands were met. No arbitrary firings. The right to belong to a union of their own choosing. A living wage. They wanted these simple rights.

Mike Fusello, a stocky circulation manager, explained what it was all about. The strike had started in December 1938, and the newspapermen were prepared to fight to the end. Eighteen babies had been born to striking families in the course of the strike. Their fathers and mothers had to feed, educate and care for them. That was what they were fighting for. "Goons" hired by Hearst had assaulted the strikers. Nate Aleskovsky, young and wide-eyed, showed us pictures of strong-arm men slugging pickets with crank handles and kicking fallen boys into a state of unconsciousness. Chicago courts had issued injunctions against the Guild on the charge of "disorderly conduct."

Activity at headquarters ceased as the strikers congre-

gated for their nightly meeting. We pledged the support of associate members of the Newspaper Guild. The strikers cheered.

Helen and Lillian slept at the home of a rewrite man and his wife, while the others stayed with one of Chicago's ace reporters. Everything in these homes belonged to us during our stay. "That's the way you learn to do things when you're on strike," the rewrite man declared. "Not according to Hearst," his wife laughed and turned to the girls. "Well, do we look mean—as if we're going to throw bombs and start riots?"

Early the next morning, the rewrite man's wife woke the girls. She brought coffee, without cream or sugar. "We've learned to like coffee plain like this. You learn to like a lot of things when you have to go through a strike."

We walked on our second picket line, relieving two young copy boys.

"I took the copy boy's job," one of them explained, "figuring on working myself up to a reporter. They stalled me for three years. Under the Guild, I'd get a chance to prove that I can hold down a job."

We told him we were associate Guild members.

"You need them around here," he said. "There are a couple of college boys scabbing. They don't know a thing. Which I guess is why they're scabbing."

Months later, when we read that the Chicago Guild, after seventeen months, had won the Hearst strike, and their right to self-respect, we felt that these newspapermen had won something for us too.

Youth—it's a problem. People sometimes say that as if there were something wrong with youth.

We visited the Young Men's Christian Association and the National Youth Administration to find out about youth in Chicago. Miss Knorr, YMCA employment director, told us there were ten applicants for every job that came through her office. "I don't know what the other nine do. Some come in and tell me, 'What can we do? Jump in the lake?'"

"You want to know about youth?" a large, red-faced man interrupted. "I'll tell you. All this pampering of youth and the unemployed is ruining the country. Let them shift for themselves like I did forty years ago." He was introduced as Major Skully, a YMCA official and an old-time power in the Republican Party in Chicago.

"Youth problem. Hrrmph," he said. "Sure, there's a youth problem, and it's everybody's problem: to stop spending the nation's wealth." He explained how each young American owed large sums of money and was going to be drowned in the morass of depression for the next three generations by the weight of mortgages around his neck.

In the lobby, a gray-suited youth had a copy of the *Chicago Times* spread out before him. It was opened to the Help Wanted page.

"Anything doing?" asked Mel.

"No."

"Tough?"

"I used to be in business with a friend. Then the creditors clamped down. My partner took the last money he had and bought himself some bottles of whisky. He locked himself in his room and stayed drunk for four days." The boy handed the paper to Mel and walked away.

We checked up on this "crazy spending" and "pampering of youth" when we looked up the National Youth Administration office in a tall building. More than 20,000 high school and college students in Illinois would have

been forced out of school had it not been for the aid they received from NYA. Another 13,000, training for various occupations, worked and were paid by the NYA. The NYA director gave us a list of projects to visit. We saw one—the Negro project on South Wabash Street.

Young Negro boys bent over lathes and planes, fashioning tools, rebuilding broken toys. Girls were busy at sewing machines and drawing boards.

Was the NYA “pampering” them? They were all under twenty-five years of age; they were *learning* and *working*. They hoped and planned for a future. Old Major Skully no longer had to think about *his* future.

Some young people thought about the future; others were too busy thinking about the present. One of the striking newspapermen took us over to see Herb March, district director of the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee, who was just a little bit over twenty-five. We found him in his office, in the heart of the packinghouse slums. Tall, black-haired, with sharp black eyes, he had been shot by thugs three days before, and his arm was in a sling.

Chicago—hog center of the world—frankfurters and glue and ham and puppy food. Workers stand in scum and knee-high water in foul little rooms and make these things. The stockyards stank. We could not breathe. Under the PWOC, the stockyards had organized. Herb March led them. They were fighting consumption and rheumatism, injustice and slums.

“Won’t the men who shot you try to harm your wife and children?” Helen looked very solemn.

Herb March smiled. “They’d better not,” said this tall, bright-eyed idol of the packinghouse workers. “Then I’ll get mad.”

From the Hudson River to Lake Michigan . . . Every-

thing for Industry . . . little Eddie Wagner in Lancaster . . . kids without shoes in the quiet Blue Ridge mountain towns . . . blond Bert Foster and the Cleveland automobile workers. . . . "Don' want nothin' except to live decent" . . . Carnegie Steel . . . the reporters on the Newspaper Guild picket line . . . "You learn to like a lot of things when you have to go through a strike" . . . old Major Skully didn't need a future . . . the young Negro boys on the NYA project did . . . Chicago, hog center of the world. . . .

Everything for Industry?

### Chapter 3 WHERE IS THE WEST?

☛ We learned road etiquette at night. Cars approaching out of the darkness blinked their headlights and tooted a friendly greeting. Mel forced himself to stay awake by concentrating on toots and blinks. Helen, not trusting in this method alone, started to sing, and the others joined in raucously.

*East Side, West Side, all around the town . . .*

"Hey, we're not in New York now!"

"Of course not! Who wants to learn a new song?"

"We do!"

"Okay, pay attention to the words, not to my monotone. . . .

*"Now Old Abe Lincoln, a great big giant of a man was he,  
(Yassuh!)*

*He was born in an old log cabin and he worked for a livin'  
(Splittin' rails!)*

*Now Abe he knew right from wrong,*

*For he was honest as the day is long,  
And these are the words he said:*

*This country, with its institutions,  
Belongs to the people who inhabit it.*

*This country, with its constitution,  
Belongs to those who live in it.*

*Whenever they shall grow weary*

*Of the existing government,*

*They shall exercise their constitutional rights of amending it,  
Or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it!"*

BANG!

Our car wobbled, and Mel stopped at the side of the road. "Blow-out," he announced calmly. He changed the tire by the light of a candle.

In the morning, the girls washed clothes and hung them all over the yard of the cabin camp, until the angry owner came out and lectured about "certain limitations which tourists must observe."

"But we're not tourists!"

The owner didn't care *what* we were. So with one valise stuffed full of wet clothes, we reached Springfield. It didn't look like the West. Where were the bony drawling farmers? The boys on horseback? The West that was *Western*?

Just another hot, tired town. We saw nothing to remind us of Abraham Lincoln, who had lived and worked here. There was a memorial to him on one of the streets, and his tomb was here too. But we didn't want to look at concrete statues. A thin old man, lolling on the step of a grocery store, talked with us reluctantly. Half the miners in the town were unemployed. No work around.

"We'da starved if it wasn't fer WPA," he said.

A few miles out of town, a sign informed us that "Abraham Lincoln used to go swimming in this lake." We asked some picnickers if there was a beach near by.

"Sure," replied a pale, freckled youth. "The white beach is down there"—he pointed in one direction—"The beach over there"—he pointed the other way—"is for niggers."

*"Now Abe he knew right from wrong,*

*For he was honest as the day is long . . ."* Mel sang softly.

Had Springfield forgotten Abe Lincoln?

A uniformed CCC boy stood at the roadside. "Thanks," he said as we opened our door to him. "I've been waiting hours for a ride." He was on his way home to St. Louis, on his first leave since he entered the camp three weeks ago. His name was Tommy.

"I signed up for six months, and I'm going to sign up for eighteen more if I can," Tommy told us. "I want to learn to be a mechanic. They just started to hold classes in my camp. If a fellow wants to learn a trade, he gets twenty boys to sign up for it. Then a teacher is sent in."

When his father lost his job in the meat-packing yards, Tommy came to the camp. Most of the boys, he said, came for the same reason. Tommy earned thirty dollars a month, out of which he kept eight for himself and sent the rest to his family. Army officers, he said, directed the camp.

"Do you like the army part?" George asked.

"Naw." He scratched his shoulder. "I don't like these uniforms either. They're too itchy."

He laughed self-consciously. "My, you people ask a lot of questions."

We left him at the gateway to the West for pioneers, past and present. . . .

"Where industry gives way to farming, home of the Gas

House Gang, neither East nor West, North nor South, just middle—St. Louis, here we come!"

"Yes, here we come for fifty-five cents," said George. "There's a toll bridge over the Mississippi."

"Hey! That narrow little trickle—Old Man River? Fifty-five cents for what? Just to get into St. Louis? Isn't Missouri part of the Union?"

Up the cobblestone streets of St. Louis, into the main thoroughfare that could pass easily for a part of Broadway, we drove directly to the Hotel Jefferson. We had an important date there—a regional conference of the National Youth Administration, Aubrey Williams, national administrator.

We called up Helen Fuller, one of the many NAMES in Lillian's notebook. Blonde and stocky, she came down to the lobby surrounded by state NYA directors. She marveled at our appearance. We didn't look as if we were bumming around the country, she said. Maybe we didn't look it, but we certainly felt it.

She introduced us to the directors. These were the men and women who were paid by the government to give youth a break. The break meant job opportunities, the "dollar signs" on the President's budget, the shoes and schoolbooks, the "economy items" Congress and the President talked about in Washington.

Dave Williams from Texas fondled his handlebar mustache and sat cross-legged on the lobby floor. "I'm a member of the Republican Party," he said in a deep and sinister voice.

We didn't know whether we could laugh until Helen Fuller giggled. "After this NYA conference ends, I'm going to attend another one in Salt Lake City," she said. "We're preparing now to put up a stiff battle for adequate NYA appropriations when Congress opens."

"I'm a Republican," Dave Williams repeated and smirked. "You're letting the country go to the dogs."

"You *must* come to visit me at the NYA office when you reach Kansas," said tall and good-natured Anne Laughlin. "I have *so much* to show you. I'll take you all to lunch. You *must* come to Topeka."

We promised to come for lunch.

The lean, white-suited king of them all, Aubrey Williams, sat in the largest chair in the lobby and peered at us through thick glasses as we grouped about him. "Ah, yes," he drawled when we told him about our trip, "but it seems you're going too fast, much too fast. Take it more slowly. There's too much to see in this country." He laughed shortly. "What have you found out about youth so far?"

"They need jobs. They need help."

"Ah, yes, it's as simple as all that." He measured us with his eyes.

That night star reporter Ellwood Douglas, another NAME, offered to put up the two girls for the night. They squeezed into his open roadster while the boys trailed behind. Doug, who was small and dark, sported Mexican sandals and a wide silver bracelet. He stopped before a small white cottage surrounded by dark country. A small young woman stood in the doorway. "This is Jean, my wife."

Jean displayed immediate and unusual acumen.

"I'll bet you're hungry!"

Doug laughed lightly. "What do you think?"

With our eggs and her ham, Jean prepared supper as we settled down in the living room to talk with Doug. Yes, his sandals came from Mexico and so did his bracelet. So did the furniture, the rugs, the book-ends, the tablecloth. He mixed a delicious and unique drink; the recipe was Mexican.

Doug wanted to go to Mexico some day and stay there.

"I like the people. They're simple and good."

"But you're a nationally known newspaperman! You mean you actually would prefer some tiny out-of-the-way spot in Mexico to your work on the paper?" We were astounded.

"You don't know Mexico," Doug laughed.

He took out a small pouch from the pocket of his blue cotton shirt and quietly fingered some tobacco into a tan tissue cylinder. We watched his dark sensitive face as he rolled the cigarette.

"Uh . . . Mexican?"

"Yes," he laughed, a light musical laugh. Some people laugh mechanically, a plain ha-ha you never notice. Doug's laugh was different. We could feel something warm and kind inside him when he laughed.

After we had eaten, Jean sat on the floor near Doug's chair and played with their large black dog. She watched humorously when Joe dived for the phonograph and started to give a disk by disk analysis of each symphony.

We found ourselves talking about our own lives. Not that it was difficult to get us to talk, but some people are interested and others are not. Doug and Jean were interested. They wanted to know about everything we had seen and what we had thought of everything we had seen. We talked—until the Mexican clock struck two. The boys left for a near-by tourist camp.

An hour later the telephone rang, waking Doug. "Hello . . . this is George calling. . . . I lost the wallet with all our money. Can you look around? Maybe I left it at your house."

Doug looked. No wallet. He sat up worrying about how

to get us back to New York. At five o'clock, George called again.

"Never mind . . . don't bother looking for the money. I found it under the seat of the car. Good night."

"Good *morning*," laughed the even-tempered Doug. "Come over for breakfast."

A rooster roused Helen and Lillian under Mexican blankets. The boys trooped in to announce, "We spent the night in a castle."

Doug laughed sleepily.

"It *was* a castle," Joe insisted. "Beds like feathery clouds, drapes and ivory toilets . . . a castle."

We said elaborate good-bys after a breakfast of bacon and eggs. Doug and Jean went off, leaving us the house. "See you in San Francisco," said Doug. We promised to lock the door and call in the dog before we left.

"We've got to send half our luggage ahead," Mel began, "because the springs of the car are sinking."

"You girls must have thought you were going to Europe," George drawled, his head and legs draped over the sides of an armchair.

We voted. Mel and George departed with a hundred pounds of baggage to send on to San Francisco. It was one mile to the city. Passing through the Negro quarter, the boys saw women huddled around charcoal stoves in front of rows of wooden shacks.

"I don't see why they need those stoves for cooking. It's hot enough to boil coffee on the sidewalks." George looked at Mel expecting some response. Mel said nothing.

The Railway Express took our hundred pounds, and the two boys started back to Doug's house on North Sappington Road, in Kirkwood. For two miles they watched the cows, chickens and corn until they realized they were lost. That's

St. Louis for you; tall buildings and corn fields rub shoulders.

## 2

Missouri was soft and beautiful at night. We drove in silence, our windows open to the warmth and sweetness of the land. We didn't want to talk. The boys decided the night was too good to spend in a stuffy cabin. They would sleep outdoors—and save money into the bargain. With Helen and Lillian safely registered in a cabin, George stretched out the small canvas covering, taken from the luggage rack, in a hay field behind the camp. Joe, remembering instructions in an old Boy Scout handbook, dug a small hole in the ground to fit his posterior. Mel lay down on the canvas and watched the stars until he fell asleep.

The storm broke at three in the morning, a Missouri storm, hard and howling. Lightning struck twenty yards away from the boys. Joe and George grabbed canvas, blankets and the still sleeping Mel. They cursed the rain. In New York rain meant wet dark streets, hurrying people, galoshes and umbrellas. We measured its importance only by the degree of discomfort it caused. Then we talked to a Missouri farmer about the rain. We discovered that rain equaled air in importance out here. Our cloistered notions of a "Western" West began to fade slowly.

"First rain we've had in three months," said the Missouri farmer. Unsmiling, he continued to eat his lunch without rising from the flat stone seat in the field.

"We got wet last night," said George. "We were sleeping in the fields."

The farmer looked up, his dry expression unchanged. "Had a long drought. Rain'll bring the corn along more regular."

"Did the drought hurt the crops much?"

"Wa-a-al, that depends. Don't matter too much which way the crop goes any more. No money in raisin' crops."

"No money?"

"Farmers ain't gettin' anythin' for their crops. Cost a dollar to raise a bushel of wheat, and we get forty-four cents. If it wuzn't for the gov'nment help, we'd all go hungry." He looked sharply at us and returned to his lunch.

The Midwestern farmer, he wanted the rain. It meant life for his crops. We knew he could not be indifferent to this life, for it was his life too. Yet it didn't matter which way the crop went. It mattered to the farmer to see a healthy crop. But it did not matter which way the crop went, because there was no money in raising food any more.

At Jefferson City, the state capital, we stopped to feed the car.

"I'll go shopping," said Helen, "and we'll have a sandwich lunch."

The tall thin youth in the Little Old Dutch Grocery helped carry the bundles to the car.

"Must be real nice traveling," he said wistfully. "Here I am tied up fourteen hours a day in the store. I've been working for two years. Can't go to school in this town and don't see as I'm ever going to get ahead."

"Don't you like it here?" Helen queried.

"I hate it. Everything's so slow and dead. . . ."

Missouri's fields of corn changed from healthy green to sickly yellow as we moved toward Kansas. Stalks turned shriveled points earthward. Dust slowly covered the car, inside and outside. The distance between Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, was less than ten miles, but we began to discover a world of difference between the two states.

Long rows of market stalls near the state border attracted us. Some humorless farmer and his sun-bonneted wife, no doubt, would gladly talk to us. Instead, Beulah and Dorothy, slim and sophisticated, gladly talked to us. The stalls were still packed with produce and, as closing time neared, the farmers eagerly sold their wares at any price. Helen fingered a tremendous cantaloupe as we talked.

Twenty-year-old Dorothy had been seeking work since her graduation from high school a year before. "I've been trying everywhere. Just guess people don't need me."

"Don't you like the farm?" asked Lillian.

"No, I don't. It's too hard, and there's no future in it. But I have to stay unless I get a job."

Beulah's flaxen hair and blue eyes could rate her a Brünnehilde role. Education, she said, came first in her family, and she would go to the University of Kansas in three years, when she was nineteen. She didn't intend to stay on the farm if she could help it.

"What do you do on the farm?" Mel asked shyly.

"I get up at six in the morning, make breakfast and milk the cow. Then I have to clean the vegetables and bring them to the market. After school, I help out here until closing time. We're just truck farmers. My father wants to buy a larger farm, but I don't know." She nodded doubtfully. "I don't know if I'll stay on it."

People in the Midwest, the girls proudly disclosed, were very tolerant and independent. Beulah explained more fully. "Now take Dorothy and me. She's a Catholic and I'm a Methodist. We go to different churches on Sunday, and then we're together again on Monday. We're good friends."

For twenty cents we bought five heavy cantaloupes, and ate one for breakfast for four days. On the fifth day, the last

of the stock had rotted. We wondered if all Kansas would be like that, if its richness and vastness faced decay.

We passed dry, unyielding land—the beginnings of decay and death. No wonder Beulah and Dorothy wanted to leave the farms. We were not the only five young people in America who thought about the future. What did Kansas have to offer? Dead land. Youth shies away from death; we're too much concerned with life.

When we parked before the offices of the *Lawrence World*, the town's main newspaper, all of Lawrence seemed to cluster about us to stare at the "New York World's Fair 1939" license plate. Middle-aged women glared suspiciously at Helen and Lillian in their slacks and blouses, at George in his loud orange-striped trousers, and at Mel and Joe in their hobo costumes.

Mr. Murray, the *World's* managing editor, led us into his private office. Daguerreotypes and old prints covered the walls. We sat in antique chairs as Mr. Murray removed a large rifle from the top of a high desk.

"This is a 'Beecher Bible,'" he explained. "During the critical times before the Civil War, Reverend Beecher sent hundreds of these rifles to the Abolitionists in Kansas. They came packed in boxes marked 'Bibles.' That's how they came to be called 'Beecher Bibles.' They're still good." He removed his glasses and squinted down the barrel.

We asked how the Midwest felt about war.

"The Midwest," Mr. Murray replied directly, "doesn't want to have anything to do with war. We're farmers out here and still remember what happened after the last war."

"What happened after the last war?" Joe scratched his head.

"All the farmers bought and plowed sub-marginal land, because farming was profitable with war prices. They went

into debt up to their ears for mortgages, equipment and seed. After the war ended, the European nations started to raise their own food, and our farmers went broke. They had only a load of mortgages to show for their trouble."

He smiled at our intent faces.

"You have a lot to learn about the Midwest and Kansas," he said.

## 3

"Why, today's one of our cooler days," the Topekan said as he briskly turned up his coat collar. The temperature read 104°.

We hurried to the offices of the NYA to remind good-natured Anne Laughlin of the promised luncheon. She beamed at us.

"*Am* I glad to see you. *Do* sit down. Or *would* you rather go to lunch first?"

"Might as well." George grinned.

In an air-cooled café, we comfortably packed away gobs of chicken salad and glasses of cold milk. Our hostess rambled on about the NYA in Kansas. Of the 350,000 youth in the state, only 18,000 were covered by NYA. But *wait* till she showed us what those 18,000 were doing.

"Now *come* along and first we'll see the Mayor," she proposed.

John F. Scott, Republican Mayor of Topeka, in shirt sleeves and a Panama hat, removed his feet from the desk as we entered. Tossing off a Coca-Cola, he threw the empty bottle into a corner to keep company with half a dozen others.

"Youth, eh? I always like to meet young people."

We shook hands and took seats around his desk.

"Miss Laughlin is a great friend of youth." He smiled. "She sold me on this NYA proposition."

Miss Laughlin laughed modestly.

"Of course," the Mayor continued, "first we have to get jobs for the older folks so they can support the younger ones."

The newspapers had headlined the pending cuts in WPA. What did the Mayor think of them? "It's a good thing," he declared, leaning back in his swivel chair. "Now those who have been on the rolls for eighteen months will be dropped to make room for the unemployed. That'll give those without work a chance."

"But how about those who have been dropped? What will they do?" Helen asked in a puzzled voice.

"They'll have to find private employment. They're probably tired of living off the government anyway."

"Oh."

Mayor Scott did his bit for youth by presenting us each with a courtesy card signed by him personally.

"What are they good for?" George asked Miss Laughlin as we left City Hall.

"You won't get any parking tickets if you show the card to the policeman," she replied. We were leaving Topeka that night.

Next stop: Charley Sessions, managing editor of the *Topeka Capital*, owned by Senator Arthur Capper, Republican. The dignity of his white hair and ruddy face fitted with the bulge around his middle. He started by telling us that one-fourth of the college graduates in Kansas had left the state in the last ten years.

"What about the farmer?" George asked. "We've heard that young people don't want to stay on the farms because there's no future for them there."

"The farmer needs one thing," Sessions replied. "He must

get a price equal to his cost of production. That means dollar wheat. And you can't have it as long as there are gamblers in Chicago determining in one minute what 20,000,000 farmers are going to get for their year-round labor. The New Deal has failed to lift farm prices. The government has to control the grain markets if the country is to get back on its feet."

"Does it matter whether crops grow or not? Is there overproduction of farm products?"

"There's no overproduction of anything in this country. I wish people would get that notion out of their heads. If people have purchasing power, they can buy those products."

"Do you think the New Deal has done anything to raise that purchasing power?"

"Sure it has. The WPA and the rest of the alphabet will have to be continued and perfected no matter which party wins in 1940."

Reporters dashed about the outer office, but we kept popping questions at Sessions. He was against the New Deal, but he seemed to favor the New Deal program. We couldn't figure him out.

"How about the NYA?"

"I'm in favor of it. When kids don't work, you get gangsters like the Karpis boys. Of all criminal offenses here last year, 52.4 per cent were committed by youngsters under twenty-nine. You can't blame them."

We still couldn't figure him out. Next morning, we found a front-page story in his newspaper.

YOUNGSTERS FROM "SIDEWALKS  
OF NEW YORK" HERE TO FIND  
OUT WHAT WE'RE THINKING

Five budding journalists—three boys and two girls—

straight from the "Sidewalks of New York"—reached Topeka yesterday in a swing through the West to find out what ails us out here. They all seem to be New Dealers from who laid the chunk. They are an inquisitive bunch and can ask as many questions as the late Arthur Brisbane could in his palmy days. . . .

" . . . from who laid the chunk'?" Joe quoted. "What does that mean?"

Nobody knew for another ten thousand miles. Then an engineer in Houston, Texas, explained it meant "from the very beginning" or "of old standing." New Dealers from the very beginning? Not at all, but we wouldn't sue Charley Sessions for libel. We liked him even if we couldn't understand him.

In Anne Laughlin's car we sped to Atchison ninety miles away to visit an NYA Residence Project for girls. "You *will* be impressed," the director warned. We were.

"We're proud of all this," said Melba, leading us from cellar to attic. We did everything ourselves, papered the walls, scraped and varnished the floors, sewed the curtains and made slip covers for the furniture. This is our home."

We first met Melba when she served our dinner, prepared by the girls on the project. She was very slim, and her dark eyes laughed as she placed platters of roast beef before us. The plump, well-mannered supervisor of the project set a restrained tone at the dinner table and most of the girls followed. But not Melba—who came from Hiawatha, Kansas, and whose grandmother had named her after a box of talcum powder. Melba led us out to the front porch, where she strummed on a guitar as the girls sang.

She wanted to go to college. Sometimes the NYA directors choose one of the girls on a project and send her to col-

lege. Melba hoped they would choose her. So did we. . . . She had tried all sorts of work, from waiting on tables to teaching in a kindergarten, but the jobs never lasted. Most of the people she knew in Hiawatha were on relief.

"I'm twenty-one now," she said. "I don't know how I'll vote. But I know if anyone tried to take any of this away"—she covered the residence home with a wave of the hand—"do you know what would happen? There would be a revolution. You can't take these things away from us!"

## 4

Kansas. More than 400 miles from east to west. Miles and miles of flat land, hot sun, dust and deserted shacks.

We began to hate the ugly land, to count the minutes until we would leave the state. Bugs and grime covered our windshield; only the half-circles covered by the mechanical wipers were clear. We slumped in the corners of the car, closed the windows to keep out the hot air and opened them almost immediately because we could hardly breathe. We passed rickety cars packed with human beings and furniture; whole fortunes trailed behind in home-made carts, going to the Coast with us. In the early morning, we saw families huddled at the side of the road. We didn't know then that they were the opening chapters in a book, *The Grapes of Wrath*. We were to see that book come true.

US 40—the road to the great West. Again the small towns got in our way—Abilene, Manhattan, Salina, Ellsworth, Ogallah, Wakeeney, Collyer. . . .

Collyer, a gas-station town forty miles from the Colorado border, attended to our car and its occupants. Ted Lang owned the station. Mosquitoes buzzed thickly about the luncheon counter and our legs.

"Plenty of them around," remarked Mrs. Lang in a quaint German accent crossed with a Midwestern twang. She was small and plump, and her face shone with perspiration. "With all the land burnt up, millions of these bugs come."

Ted Lang, chunky and dark, sat next to us silently eating a supper of hamburgers.

"Land looks pretty deserted around here," Helen ventured.

"Sure," he replied after having cleaned his plate with a chunk of white bread. "Sure. Ain't had rain for nearly six months now. Ain't had a good crop in last seven years. Why should people hang around here? They can't make any money with what they're payin' for wheat."

"Hasn't the AAA helped the farmers?"

"Sure," he replied as his children gathered around. They listened eagerly. "It's helped. But the farmers don't like it. It's all right for the big boys who can afford to let a good part of the land lie fallow. Them boys make dough on it. But the little fellows with only a small acreage take a beating. And the big farmers are throwing tenants off the land just to leave it lie fallow and collect the allotment. There must be fifty carloads of them tenants passing by here each day."

The small thin daughter, in a short gingham dress and bare feet, stared at Lillian's hair. She interrupted her father's discourse.

"Such hair—just like doll's hair," she said. "How do you make it so curly?"

"I don't," Lillian said. "It just grows that way. I can't help it."

The little girl smoothed her own hair. "Gee, mine's so straight." She pointed to Helen and Joe.

"Are you and him brother and sister?"

"No," Helen said kindly.

"Husband and wife?"

"No."

"Oh."

She lost interest and turned again to her father.

"Everything is monopoly today," Ted Lang continued, stroking his little girl's hair. "The railroads, the market, the grain elevators and even the land. One fellow in Southern Kansas owns a tract that's sixty miles on each side. One man can't work all that land, but he collects the biggest allotment check in the country."

"What are you going to do? What's everybody going to do?" Joe asked.

"We got to get rid of those racketeers in Chicago and Kansas City. They gamble with our sweat on the Exchange. They pay low prices for the wheat—forty-four cents. Then they sell to flour companies for much higher." Lang blew his nose loudly.

"That's right," Mrs. Lang put in. "I buy a sack of flour and pay \$1.25 for that forty-four-cent wheat. Then I buy loaves of bread, and it costs me six dollars."

"And," Lang continued, "there's got to be a way for the farmers to sell and make a livin'. The government has to give plenty more help."

While Ted Lang taught us something about the Kansas farmer, Mel inspected the tires outside.

"How many do you want?" drawled Lang's dark and angular son, propping a foot on the running board. His dusty sombrero was tilted back in approved Hollywood fashion.

"Fill it up. It'll take about twelve," said Mel.

"Where you headed?" asked young Lang, watching the indicator click off the gallons.

"San Francisco. Say, what do people around here think of President Roosevelt?" Mel asked.

"Roosevelt! That goddamn Jew! He's no goddamn good. He's ruining the farmers out here. He makes them plow the crops under, and a few miles away, in Wakeeney, people are starving. Is that right?"

"I guess it's just a way of giving the farmers a better price," Mel began to explain.

"What do you mean, a better price! How can there be a better price when the Jews control everything? The Jews are the international bankers, and they control all the money in the world. What they don't control, they're trying to get."

"I think Father Coughlin says that," Mel suggested.

"Sure. I listen to him on the radio. I read his paper, *Justice* or something. He tells you how the Jews are ruining this country."

"I don't know . . ." Mel began.

"Sure, the Jews own all the banks and everything. They run the unions. They're the Communists and they run the government." He pulled his sombrero fiercely over his eyebrows.

"Say, how old are you?"

"Sixteen."

Mel called us from the lunch counter.

"Good-by," said Mrs. Lang. "Sorry I had to charge you ten cents for the loaf of bread. It shouldn't cost more than four cents."

A breeze came up, blowing thick dust into our car. Ted Lang held up his hand, his head upturned, hungrily seeking moisture in the sky. Then he went back inside, shaking his head.

## 5

After feverish Kansas, Colorado freshened us. The difference became noticeable as we approached Denver, "second capital of the United States." Following dry, powderish river beds, we rose gradually with the land. We were still looking for the *real* West. Kit Carson, named after the famous Indian fighter, gave us some of the things we had expected. Here at last, cowboys in boots and sombreros lounged on the street corners and burst out of swinging doors.

We first spotted the Rocky Mountains in Limon, fifty miles from Denver. They looked like clouds, dark and very far away. We saw more cowboys, in high boots and large hats, who drove into town in cars, parking them sideways in the manner of a horse tied to a hitching post. As Western as the Lone Ranger set we would see in Hollywood, Limon held us, and we stared.

An unshaven youth in dusty clothes stuck his head into our car. His eyes fastened on us uncertainly.

"Spare a dime for a cup of coffee?" His eyes wandered to each of us, awaiting a response which could humiliate or help. A native of Philadelphia, he told us he had been all over the country, looking for a job. We gave him the dime, some of our food stock and a couple of cigarettes.

"Wish you luck!" George called. The youth nodded and walked away.

We felt embarrassed. We had something. That boy had nothing. We wanted him to know the car really didn't belong to us, the valises contained old shirts and few dresses, the money came from people who had tried to give us a break. We knew he had thought us "tourists."

To have refused him the dime or cigarettes would have been worse. But who were we to act like philanthropists?

Why should we have been placed in a position of condescension? Our alms separated us from him, the difference between having something and nothing at all. But we wished he had understood.

"It's crazy and wrong out here," said Helen, her warm, eager face turned questioningly to the others. "Strong wonderful people slowly being killed by this land. All they want is the chance to work the land; it's their life. But the land and its crazy system are killing them . . . maybe not physically, but they're dead inside. And that boy from Philadelphia is dead inside too. It's wrong."

It was wrong. The Missouri farmer had told us it didn't matter if crops lived or died, if food was grown or not. We had seen hungry people, young boys who wanted food and young girls who wanted jobs. Charley Sessions had said there was no overproduction of food; all people needed was purchasing power. Ted Lang had shown us how the small farmer was being killed, driven off the land, his means of life taken from him by speculators in Chicago. Some young people were getting help, like Melba at the NYA. Others were getting mean and twisted, like Ted Lang's son. We tried to put these facts together, to add them. We got one answer—it was wrong. Rain, the important and life-giving element, should have gladdened the Missouri farmer. The young Philadelphia boy and the two girls at the market stalls should be able to work and give something worthwhile to America. Farmers should be able to grow and sell food, and people should have jobs, so they could buy it. Otherwise, it was wrong, tragically wrong.

Silently we rode toward the mountains. We saw no farms, only large ranches and straight lines of cattle wandering within the fenced-in ground. Furrowed and brown like its people, the land stretched endlessly, again arousing our eager-

ness for the West. The Rocky mountains stood clear and wonderfully high and challenging as we drove into Denver.

Lillian went into action.

"George, you go to the Farmers Union; Joe to the NYA; Mel, get hold of some young people; Helen, see if you can talk to some of the tourists who come here to get healthy; I'll cover City Hall and the press."

"We'll meet here, where the car is parked, at six o'clock," Mel reminded.

We drifted over smooth, clean Denver. Helen found her "tourists"—people sick and thinking they were sick. She found doctors, rest homes, clinics, psychiatrists and hospitals—all prospering.

"It's high and dry here," said a paunchy, red-faced businessman, who hailed from Scranton, Pennsylvania, "and good for my liver."

Helen began to have misgivings and sought comfort at a soda counter. "This city is full of parasites," the soda jerker told her. "We have no industries. We're a distributing and commercial center for Western markets. People live off each other and off the tourists who come here."

Joe learned about the NYA from a young director whose name he will never forget—Amer Lehman.

"Congress simply must appropriate larger sums for NYA. Young people come to us, seeking education and jobs. . . ." The NYA director broke off suddenly. "What's the use of talking about it? You're going through the Rockies tomorrow. If you survive"—he paused and grinned—"stop at Grand Junction. You'll see a project out there that'll make your ears stand on end."

Joe wrote down "See Grand Junction . . ." and saw the mountains as he walked out of the building. He wandered about the streets, searching for a New York license plate; he

had forgotten the name of the street where we had parked the car. Finally, he walked into the police station, insisting that an order go out to squad cars.

"They'll leave without me," he explained excitedly. "What'll I do in Denver all alone?"

The brass-buttoned sergeant leaned forward, with something of a New York cop's steely glint in his eye. "Look, sonny. Try to remember where you left your friends. Go back there, and you'll find them."

Joe looked at the officer; the glint did not melt. Joe methodically took up the search for our meeting place, street by street.

George found lanky Bob Moore, young editor of the Farm Union's newspaper. A farmer's son, Bob had left the land to attend college. Now he commuted from the farm to his Denver office daily.

"You can't understand farmers unless you've been one or lived among them." He paced up and down his small office, explaining the work of the Farm Union, which had inaugurated a co-operative system. "Farmers can buy almost anything through the union. It saves them money. We're trying now to organize local selling and processing co-operatives."

George returned directly to the car, where he found Mel sitting dejectedly on the running board. "Didn't you get anything?"

"Not much," said Mel. "I went over to the Young Democrats, but they were too busy playing pool. They didn't want to talk."

Lillian and Helen approached.

"What did you find out?" asked Mel.

Lillian pursed her lips. "I spent two hours looking for City Hall. This is some town. Nobody knew where it was. Can

you imagine? By the time I found it, the place was deserted. Where's Joe?"

Joe? We waited an hour and left a note on the car door: "We're having dinner in restaurant around corner. Come fast or starve." We were starting on our desserts when Joe limped into the restaurant.

"It's a good thing you guys didn't leave me here," he said. "I just saw all of Denver, and I don't like it, especially the cops!"

"We just had a delicious steak dinner," said Helen evenly. "Aren't you hungry?"

Joe hesitated.

"What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"Naw . . . only . . ." he smiled foolishly, "you know I saw this Lehman fellow over at the NYA . . ."

"Yup," George said, taking a large spoonful of ice cream. "What did you find out about NYA?"

"Listen," Joe sat down, his face worried. "Listen, this guy says '*some people*' get out of the Rockies alive. He says we got to go through narrow passes, roads built on tiny ledges, hairpin curves . . ."

Mel laughed. "Aw, he was trying to scare you. You're not scared, are you?"

"But look," Joe cried. "You can see them sticking up right in front of you. They're a thousand times higher than the Empire State Building!"

We looked at the mountains and then at Joe. We realized he was scared stiff.

"What did you find out about NYA?" asked Lillian impatiently. But changing the subject did no good. We silently wondered if this Lehman fellow knew what he was talking about.

Joe started to eat slowly. "One-fifth of young people in

Denver unemployed," he said absentmindedly. "Lehman said to go see Grand Junction . . . if we ever get over. . . ."

Next morning we followed all instructions to help us "get over." We ate no breakfast. With gum in our mouths (it helps your breathing) and cotton in our ears (it prevents ringing) we started to climb the magnificent Rockies.

The huge walls of rock separated us from the West, but they could not keep us apart for long. Mel, his dark, sharp face immobile, would get us through to the Pacific Ocean. The smooth road circled around and through the unyielding stone. How did the pioneers climb over the mountains when there were no roads? How did they struggle through with their awkward wagons? Compared with their crossing, ours would be a cinch.

It began to rain, and we wondered if Ted Lang felt it. Higher and higher, we chewed gum vigorously, feeling the power and cleanliness in the ragged forms above us. Within the mountains we found dude ranches, health resorts, mines and mining towns. With shovels and blasts, a New Jersey zinc company had torn a deep wound in the very heart of the crooked heights. Looking for zinc in the middle of a mountain! It hurt to see the wooden shacks tilted perilously on the slopes, the obvious poverty of Climax and Leadville—human misery in the midst of such poignant loveliness.

A company bus, carrying a load of miners to work, passed us. Had the mills and machinery tightened their hold even on these strong crags and cliffs?

In the quiet little town of Silver Plume in the pouring rain, an old fellow told us: "Me and my partner got a gold mine down a little ways. We're not doing so well, but we keep looking. That's what you got to do . . . keep looking."

Joe, our amateur geologist, pointed out the folded strata of rock and pedantically named the "scistose structures." Dubi-

ously, we wondered whether one year of solid failure in geology qualified him to talk with such authority.

"Paved road ends here," the sign said. We held our breaths, struggling up the narrow, muddy uncabled road at a rate of eight miles per hour. Helen put out an arm to feel the rain. "Your arm," informed George, "at the present moment is dangling thousands of feet above nothing." She quickly closed the window, trying not to look at the sheer ledge without a stick of fence to keep us from going over. Higher, higher, above the rain clouds, we reached Loveland Pass, altitude 11,992 feet. We let out our breaths and joyfully took snapshots. Helen found a patch of snow, and we threw snowballs until nothing but mud remained.

In the early evening we reached Glenwood Springs, a resort and health town for "rich and poor," a waitress at the Owl Café told us. She served us quickly while her small son pressed his nose against the window pane from outside. The "roast beef au jus" lifted us to ecstatic heights. Before us stood the mountains and behind a singing cowboy strumming a guitar.

As the sun set, we thought only in terms of color. Purple, silver and gold—only the colors of royalty graced the majesty of this place. We tried not to forget.

## 6

We "got over"—to Main Street, Grand Junction. It looked brand-new. Clean concrete buildings seemed to have just dried. The after-dinner hour found boys and girls of high school age lounging in soda shops and bowling alleys.

On the outskirts of the small city, the NYA farm project for boys lay dark. Our headlights showed a neat group of wooden buildings. We heard a cow low.

When the tall blond teacher at the camp heard of our

trip over the mountains, he offered to put up the boys for the night.

"Where can the girls stay?"

"There's a hotel in town, pretty reasonable."

With Helen and Lillian safely bundled off to a small, shiny hotel, the boys returned to the camp. The most unusual NYA project in the country, the Grand Junction farm co-operative not only gave the youth work under the regular program, but also gave them a land grant which they operated on a co-operative basis. They planted their own crops, raised their own hogs and chickens and shared the profits. The hard-pressed Colorado farmers on the Western slope of the Rockies watched the project skeptically at first, then made friends with the boys.

"If they see a bunch of kids can make a farm pay by working it co-operatively, the farmers may do the same soon, instead of starving individually," the supervisor declared.

The boys came from all parts of the country. A former football player at Columbia University had wandered to Colorado in search of a job. Another had come from Oklahoma. A third had run away from family poverty in Chicago. Others, natives of Colorado, had come to the camp to learn. They wanted to succeed where their fathers had failed—they wanted to make the farm pay.

How did they like the project? Answers varied. A curly-headed lad looked indifferently at George. "I wanted to be a mechanic. But I had to take this because it meant a job and living expenses."

We remembered what Melba had said about a "revolution," and we asked, "What would happen if the government cut NYA?"

Their answer matched Melba's—there would be trouble.

Mel, Joe and George lay on hard cots next to the boy

farmers, talking until early morning about their project, about life, and all the things boys talk about. At dawn, they watched the sun rise, filling the sky with the royal colors and shading the hills.

The treacherous passes lay behind us. Now we drove north, following the mountains to our right, over soft ascents and gentle dips, through the glorious sunburned flatlands.

Price, Utah, surrounded by mines, had a population of 5,000, more than half of whom worked in the mines. Late in July, the mines had closed, and almost 800 families went on relief. The unemployed gathered before corner stores or leaned against parked automobiles. The overalled miners conversed softly with men in ankle-tight corduroy breeches, checkered shirts and muddy boots. We bought some gasoline, and George received some silver dollars in change—the trademark of the old West.

What's happening?

"Ah dunno," an old miner shrugged. "Maybe the gov'nment'll do somethin'. When mines close down, we can't do nothin'. The gov'nment can't let folks starve."

Had a new language sprung up in America as a result of these new and terrible conditions? It shocked us to hear the same sing-song of despair from Ohio to Utah. It shocked us to hear the same plea for help—"maybe the government'll do something"—from Gary to Silver Plume in the Rocky Mountains. It shocked us all the more to see the wide gap between these people and their government. The people needed WPA and asked for government help. In return, on July 20 we read in the papers that Congress had given them cuts, pink slips, unemployment.

We reached Salt Lake City after six o'clock that night. The great Temple and Tabernacle of the Mormons had

closed and so we parked the car and wandered about the city.

"Hey! Hello!" Lillian called to a young man.

"Cut it out," George admonished. "We're on a business trip!"

"What do you mean?" Lillian replied indignantly. "I know *him*. He's William Rodgers, a newspaperman from Washington!"

We slapped backs, compared notes and marveled at the smallness of this world.

"When are you taking the desert?" Rodgers asked.

"Tonight," Mel answered. "It's the best way to avoid the heat."

"My, you've got stamina! I'm too tired to drive tonight." Rodgers looked at us with admiration.

"Well, see you in San Francisco at the Guild Convention!"

Alone, we started to cross the desert. The steady purr of the motor and the sound of our car cutting the hot wind marred the stillness. We spotted approaching cars miles away. The pin-point lights steadily increased in size until they blazed into our faces and lit up the interior of our car. We knew the sands on either side of the road were white, but we could not see their whiteness. We ran down unlucky jackrabbits. We tried desperately to stay awake. Every few hours we stopped and stiff-legged out to an elaborate luncheonette-gas station and gulped hot black coffee. Mel refused the proprietor's "Nevadoze" pills.

"Good morning!" the attendants greeted us brightly and mechanically at each stop. "Having a nice trip?"

When we reached Elko, Nevada, the whole town seemed to be up and about in spite of the early darkness. We ate our sixth breakfast of the morning. Nevada seemed to offer

little except hills and ranches; no cities or towns, only stopping-off places with slot machines, until Reno.

"And this state has two senators!" Joe exclaimed. "What do they represent?"

We hadn't slept, and we needed baths. Swimming! But the only pool in Reno charged prices to meet the purse of a divorcee. We hurried out of the city anxiously. Only two days remained before the opening of the Newspaper Guild Convention.

The border between Nevada and California was well guarded. STOP HERE! We stopped. Uniformed officials examined our luggage, forced us to leave "all fruits and vegetables in Nevada," and plastered a large California Welcomes You sign on our windshield.

Motorists from different states waited in line to clear all "passport" difficulties. Lillian and Helen wandered over to another New York car. "We're from New York too," said Lillian to a young boy in shirt sleeves.

"Brooklyn," Helen added.

"We've just come from Syracuse," he declared politely.

"Syracuse? That's our home town!" Helen got excited. "Were you on Crawford Avenue? That's where our home used to be."

"We don't live there," the older of the two men declared. "We only bought our car there. We live in California."

The girls were disappointed. They wanted to know about Crawford Avenue. The younger man began to remove the New York license plates from the car and to replace them with California tags. Joe watched curiously.

"Isn't New York as good as California?" he asked.

"Maybe," the fellow replied. "But we're residents of California. Under state regulations, we have to get new licenses."

Mel came out of the office where he had registered our entrance into California.

"You didn't have to get new license plates?" Joe asked warily.

Mel lit a cigarette. "No. Why?"

"They've got some racket out here. They make you throw away your plates and buy theirs!"

"My friends," George began to orate, "from the sun-kissed shores of California to the rock-bound coast of Maine there are . . . forty-eight different boundary lines."

"We'll take it up with the President when we get to Washington," Helen said.

Rich, heavily forested and "different"—California, the width of the state to San Francisco, lay between us and the Pacific Ocean. A clean cabin smelling of pines and health, a cold awakening swim in Lake Tahoe . . . California, the WEST.

## Chapter 4 "ROLLER-COASTER TOWN"

☛ "San Francisco," a newspaperman once wrote, "is a roller-coaster town."

A Cyclone, Loop-the-Loop Twister of streets, up and down. Underground cables slowly pulled trolley cars up the hills. People struggled to keep their balance on the steep streets. It almost seemed as if the famous earthquake had folded the city into horseshoe curves and had never straightened them out.

We entered San Francisco on the last Sunday in July at 4:15 P.M. Fairmont Hotel (rates—five dollars for a north bedroom), scene of the Newspaper Guild Convention, stood on the top of Nob Hill—some people called it "Snob Hill." We had covered 3,840 miles, climbed 12,000 feet over the Rockies—but when Mel tried to send the car up the incline of Nob Hill, we stalled and slipped back.

"I think there are too many people in here," Mel hinted. We merely drew our coats around us more closely; the weather had become amazingly cool. Mel tried it again, this time reaching halfway up the hill before we started to roll down.

"Okay," Joe conceded reluctantly. "*We'll* walk up."

As we searched for Hotel Fairmont, a big fireman, tipped back in a chair outside the station, hailed us.

"Howdy," Mel called back, anticipating a Western accent.

"How're ya yerselves?" the fireman roared back with a grin. "How's New York? Coney Island? Broadway? Good old New York! My home town!"

In the lobby of the Fairmont Hotel, some young men wearing plaid skirts surrounded us. In an accent we could hardly imagine was Western, they eagerly asked us if we had come for "MRA."

"MRA?" Lillian repeated in a puzzled voice. "No, we're here for ANG. What's MRA?" She looked at their peculiar dress.

"Moral Re-Armament," one of the skirted youths replied in a high-pitched voice. "Love, Honesty and Faith . . . you know?"

"We're here for a convention," Helen said sweetly. "But not Moral Re-Armament. Do you know where the American Newspaper Guild headquarters are?"

"Oh, that." The kilted fellow scowled. "It's in the back, over there."

"We'll come back for Moral Re-Armament," George promised the crestfallen group. Their faces brightened. "As soon as we find the Newspaper Guild."

At headquarters, we spied a New York newspaperman we knew and rushed over to greet him. He looked at us in amazement. "What! You got here?"

"What's the matter?" Lillian asked. "We were sent as delegates by the Associate Membership. So we came."

"But we never thought you'd get here! How long did it take you?"

"Sixteen days."

"Anything go wrong?"

"Nope."

Still looking at us skeptically, he called to one of the flushed men gathering around the "hospitality" table. "Hey, Reed, come over here! I want you to meet some associate members from New York."

"Reed, these kids came all the way from New York on a hundred dollars we gave them. Can you imagine?" He beamed proudly, as if he deserved some of the credit himself.

We moved through the hotel lobby with Reed. The young men in kilts stood about a large information booth marked "MRA." One of them waved to us. "Come back and learn about MRA," he called.

"They're crazy," observed Reed as we left the hotel.

"What's wrong with them?" Helen asked.

"Faith and Love," Reed muttered. "Try eating it when you're hungry!"

"We'll interview them anyway," Mel declared.

"Sure, sure," Reed agreed. "Won't hurt to interview them. Bunch of misled youngsters and frustrated dowagers. But first we'll get some good Chinese food into you. Strengthen your resistance."

We started to walk down Nob Hill and, against our will, found our heads rushing away from our bodies.

Reed maneuvered us through the narrow crowded streets of Chinatown. Tourists packed the restaurants and brightly-lit gift shops; yet the neighborhood seemed to belong to the Chinese. Placards in windows called for aid to the Chinese people in their war of resistance against Japan. "Don't Buy Japanese Goods," another sign said. Young Chinese shook collection boxes on street corners.

"Everybody likes the Chinese people," Reed said over and over again. "They're fine people, fine people."

After we had climbed back to the hotel, we were so tired we couldn't protest when the Moral Re-Armers pounced upon us. A nice old lady flanked by the laddies began to explain.

"With so much strife in the world, we feel that the only cure is Moral Re-Armament. There's too much politics, too much economics beclouding the issues in the world today. There's no reason why Honesty, Faith and Love shouldn't rule the world. Oh, it's all so terrible, the shape of the world."

"Bad shape, all right," Mel agreed.

"But what can we do about it, about wars for instance?" asked Helen.

"Oh, don't you see how MRA fits into that?" She beamed. "By Faith, Honesty and Love we couldn't possibly hate anyone. It's hate that leads to war."

"But people are saying that Great Britain and France, by letting Hitler have his own way, are pushing us toward war," George said.

"Oh, it's not so at all," the nice old lady replied with quiet indignation.

"But isn't it true that fascism conquered Austria and Czechoslovakia with the aid of British and French appeasement?" Joe asked, his round ruddy face screwed up belligerently.

The nice old lady became offended. "We have to put our own house in order before we can criticize the actions of others."

"You're right about that," Joe agreed more calmly. "We've just seen a lot of things in the country that ought to be put in order. People out of work, farmers losing their land, young people with nothing to do."

"Well, I don't know about that so much," she countered hurriedly. "We have our own problems, and other countries have theirs. We should stop hating so many people and start loving them."

Persistently, we asked more questions about what we had seen in America. How did Moral Re-Armament propose to cure wars, hunger, strikes, unemployment? No longer nice, the old lady looked sharply at us. "Faith! Honesty! Love!" she snapped, turned abruptly and began to explain Moral Re-Armament to a bald, tired-looking man.

As we stood there, one of the newspapermen sauntered over and looked mournfully at the old lady. "Look, lady," he began, "I make only eighteen dollars a week. I'm only twenty-six, and I've got to support a wife and two kids. If I use Moral Re-Armament, how can I get my editor to give me a raise?"

"I can't tell you how to get a raise," the old lady smiled sweetly, "but Moral Re-Armament can teach you how to be *happy* on eighteen dollars a week!"

"Oh . . ." said the newspaperman in a faint voice and moved away.

We learned more about MRA during the next few days. It seems that Stanley Baldwin, predecessor of Prime Minister Chamberlain, had declared that what the world needed to counteract the gas-mask spirit was "moral and spiritual re-armament." That had started it. Bunny Austin, the famous Davis Cup Tennis player of England, picked up the slogan and called the youth of England to the letters.

The newspapermen did not like MRA. Aging women sidled up to the delegates in the ANG Convention hall and started passing out literature and expounding the virtues of Dr. Buchman, that "wonderful man." *Editor & Publisher*, trade weekly of the publishers, had given Moral Re-Arma-

ment free half-page advertisements for more than ten weeks. The publishers' magazine called MRA a "new experiment" in business management to keep workers content and happy. "*Editor & Publisher* believes that Moral Re-Armament is the most constructive news of the day and provides this space without charge." An excerpt from one of the ads ran as follows:

Apprentices (after MRA conversion) volunteered to work after hours in restitution for time wasted. Employees stay late now to rectify mistakes without cost to the firm. . . . A stenographer offered to have her salary reduced when she thought the firm needed financial help. . . .

Said big Heywood Broun about MRA: "It's the uncle of fascism."

Lumbering, lovable Heywood Broun. Our first night in San Francisco he made us feel at home, as if we too had something to give the American Newspaper Guild. He set the example, a big example. We found a little piece of Heywood Broun in every newspaperman present. Yet only he combined all the qualities we loved and admired and tried to take for our own.

Late at night we stepped into foggy streets. Now we saw the difference between real fog and the smoke-dust of Pittsburgh. We liked the cool grayness of the night; it seemed to belong there, to shut out the rest of California from the "roller-coasters."

Helen, Lillian and Joe followed Reed, who jigged in high spirits to his apartment. One double bed and a parlor couch . . . the latter, a little more than five feet long. . . . Joe, very proud of his six-foot height. Joe looked at the under-sized couch. "We're going to take turns sleeping in the

good bed," he said firmly. "But, Joe . . ." Helen consoled. "Be practical. A double bed . . . two girls . . ."

In another reporter's home, Mel took out a nickel and twirled it into the air

"Heads!" cried George.

Mel stooped and picked up the coin.

"Tails. Sorry. I get the bed."

He undressed quickly and fell into the one narrow bed in the middle of the room. George stepped into his maroon pajamas with the gold braid and lay down on a thin mattress spread on the floor.

2

Heywood Broun opened his last convention of the American Newspaper Guild on July 31, 1939, at ten o'clock. We sat down at the rear of the large ballroom now filled with chairs and smoke.

"It is ten o'clock, and the meeting will be in order," drawled Broun. "Will the delegates come in and be seated?" His face was serious, his graying curly hair neatly plastered back for the first time in months. Papers bulged from the massive pockets in his wrinkled suit. He grinned quickly as another large delegation entered the hall. He hunched over the rostrum, his huge shoulders round from bending over the typewriter and the poker table.

He banged the gavel.

"I will say now that every session will begin precisely at the time scheduled. The Chair reports that he was here precisely at the point of ten, ahead of the majority of delegates. The Chair will also report it was not too easy to get here precisely on the dot of ten, because after going to the San Francisco World's Fair, the first thing I saw this morning on the editorial page of the *Examiner* was the life-sized head

of 'Ham' Fish, my old classmate in 1910 at Harvard. But in all fairness to Mr. Fish—I am not for him politically—I don't think the picture does him justice. I immediately called up and said, 'Bring me two pots of coffee.' "

We laughed, and the sixth annual convention of the organization which Heywood Broun had helped to found to protect the interests of working newspapermen, more than 20,000 of whom were members, began to take up its business. We didn't take our eyes off him. He was a great working newspaperman. Six years ago he had written:

. . . the fact that newspaper editors and owners are genial folk should hardly stand in the way of the organization of a newspaper writers' union. There should be one. Beginning at nine o'clock on the morning of October 1, I am going to do the best I can to help in getting one up. I think I could die happy on the opening day of the general strike if I had the privilege of watching Walter Lippmann heave half a brick through a *Tribune* window at a non-union operative who had been called in to write the current "Today and Tomorrow" column on the gold standard.

Seated inconspicuously behind the regular delegates, we were putting our stakes on that newspaper writers' union. A man like Broun could not be wrong.

Greetings. . . .

Harry Bridges, director of the CIO on the West Coast, a name in the morning headlines, facing deportation charges, addressed the delegates. Bridges—leader of the "laboring people" whom young Roy Sjodin back in Cleveland had talked about. We craned our necks to stare at him. Lanky and tall, his sharp long nose was thrust forward, as if he were trying to sense whether we were with him.

"... as far as the individual issue of the deportation of Bridges is concerned, we are not worried. We haven't built a one-man labor movement around here, I hope, and this labor movement is going to go on in this city and on this Coast."

The hall was quiet as the low voice, tinged with a slight British accent, continued:

"The employer interests have gone to untold lengths, have spent many thousands of dollars, have employed stool pigeons, convicts and what-not, intimidated them and pressured them, with the ultimate aim of undermining and destroying our trade unions. . . . We have sufficient testimony in the record, regardless of how we come out in the case, to the good and to the advantage of the labor movement. I want you all to know that."

From the "we" to the "I," Bridges explained his case. The "I" didn't matter, but the "we" did. The "we" would go on in spite of anything that happened to Bridges personally. We wondered about that ability of a man to submerge completely his own personal interests, his own life within a group of men. We wondered if we would be able to do the same.

"I agree with everything Harry Bridges said," said Broun, "and I am sure we all know the trial of Bridges has nothing to do with the so-called issue. It is a trial of a man who is on the spot because he is an able, efficient and honest militant labor leader. . . . I would like to live to see the day when we will have a union in newspapers in which we will have complete organization up and down the line, everybody in the city room, in the mechanical departments, and in the business office as well."

We wanted to belong to such a union. We wanted to be "working newspapermen and newspaperwomen" who could

build the ANG and fashion our lives after those of its leaders.

The convention moved on for four days, with Heywood Broun shambling through it, large and genial, always the first to arrive at the sessions and the first in the hearts of all men present. He always had time to talk to the delegates about their troubles. He was "Heywood" to everybody.

Elmer Andrews, administrator of the Wages and Hours division of the Department of Labor, was slated to address the convention.

"The short period before a speaker goes on a national hookup is generally spent by the speaker"—Broun turned to Andrews, his large kindly face wrinkled in a grin that engulfed even his nose, eyes and mouth into wrinkles—"and the audience in silent prayer, and I suggest that for the next three minutes."

"We have a tough problem. Mr. Andrews has a tough problem. One of them concerns white-collar workers. I have never liked that phrase very much. Indeed, at times I have been moved to say, 'When you call us that, smile!' And sometimes when I look at my own shirt, I often burst out laughing."

Andrews spoke about a law.

"They tell you that the Wage and Hour law is driving business into bankruptcy and throwing workers onto the street. What are the facts? . . . The number of persons employed in non-agricultural industries in May of this year was 680,000 more than were employed in May of 1938, when there was no Fair Labor Standards Act. Payrolls increased in thirty-eight states. . . ."

We thought of the questions we had seen on the faces of the people in Cleveland, Gary, Chicago, Collyer, Price. The

administrator was talking about the answer, one small answer.

"... that we may have a more just industrial democracy, a better fed, a better clothed, a better housed America, and therefore a happier and more peaceful America. . . ."

Heywood had something to say about that.

"Schools of journalism are good, pretty good or no good, as you choose, but we all know very well that men and women come into newspaper work with no set prescribed training. I could limit it to columnists. . . . Some columnists can read and write, and some columnists can just write.

"Also, your president was at one time a member of the Socialist Party. I learned Karl Marx in one afternoon, and I was told to go out and address audiences by saying, 'workers of hand and brain.' I was supposed to be, as a newspaperman, a worker of brain addressing workers of hand. It so happens that I do not write with a pencil, but on the typewriter, and I write some columns occasionally when I think both the hand and brain are functioning, but I have written a good many columns when I knew nothing was functioning but the hands on the keys of the typewriter."

We were learning fast. As the convention days went by, we arrived early in the morning and retired early the next morning. We found Doug, delegate from St. Louis, the star reporter who wanted to live among Mexican peasants. We went to town with him. We never ate better food or more of it than in San Francisco. In a small Spanish place, we first learned *how* to eat. Wine instead of water. Three entrees instead of one. Large luscious pears and grapes instead of ice cream. The meal took three hours. Doug still kept in mind the necessity of building our constitutions so that we would be strong enough to work out plans for national

organization of associate members of the Guild. And work them out we did. We had our special place in the convention.

College journalists at school, we had joined the Guild when the associate membership was inaugurated. The Guild offered us the opportunity to learn about one aspect of newspaper work not to be found in the classrooms and expected us to support its program of protection of the rights of newspaper workers. The Guild had shortened hours, raised wages, created more jobs, offered newspapermen security in their work. We followed the program, because we knew that the Guild eliminated the humiliation that went hand in hand with ". . . I'll work for nothing, just to get experience."

We met other student journalists from California universities—young Fred Vast and Bill Brownell of the *Daily Bruin* at Berkeley. Together we planned a program. Tall, red-haired and sophisticated, Anna Goldsborough of New York guided us as chairman of the Committee on Associate Membership. We emerged from the convention as members of a national organizing committee for associate members of the Guild. We felt proud to have a place in this union of newspapermen.

3

Helen Housmer of the Simon J. Lubin Society addressed the delegates one day. Her Society disseminated information about the big farmers.

"In California, they now have some 25,000 small farmers who are wedged in between these great corporation farms of California and some 200,000 or so migratory landless workers, but who have been used by the Associated Farmers as a rural front pointing toward an attack specifically on the waterfront unions . . . and more generally toward the entire trade union movement of the country."

As Helen Housmer concluded, Heywood Broun rose, his large face serious.

"The Chair would like to ask a question. The Associated Farmers so-called are actually not farmers. They are the packers and canners and large manufacturers, and 'farmers' is a kind of phony word. Is that correct?"

"That is right," the Simon J. Lubin representative declared. "They were organized, created and financed by the Southern Pacific Railroad, Standard Oil, California Packing Corporation, Bank of America, Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, and Pacific Gas and Electric. . . . They are moving into the Western States and getting duPont money, General Motors money, and J. P. Morgan money to organize Associated Farmers in Minnesota and Montana . . . in Oregon they got through the anti-picketing initiative."

She described the Associated Farmers as one of the "most virile anti-labor forces in the entire country." She told how the Associated Farmers in the Imperial Valley were effecting a merger with the Moral Re-Armament people. She related how a prominent leader of the Associated Farmers had attended an MRA convention, and on his return told the members of his group, "Boys, the rough stuff is out. We have got every darned one of them down on their knees praying."

Committees reported, and the Chair thought the report on associate membership was "excellent." The Chair had a tough time getting all the committees to report on time.

"Brother Decker and Brother Cohen," Heywood suggested warmly, "if you would agree to serve as a scouting committee, I think you will find all the committees somewhere around Room 108, and come back to report to us how soon they will be ready to bring in their material. I would urge you particularly to find the Resolutions Committee, as

they must have some material we can take up immediately. You are the explorers going into a trackless forest—and bring them back alive!"

The Resolutions Committee, having been brought back alive, started to report through its chairman, young and square-jawed Milton Kaufman, secretary of the New York Guild. Heywood gave over the chair to another delegate and took a place on the floor.

Now we began to see the program of opinion, the constructive steps which the Guild proposed in order to meet the conditions which it deplored.

"Re-emphasizes its faith in the actual unity of labor. . . . Condemns curtailment of WPA. . . . Unqualified support to Harry Bridges. . . . Preservation and extension of New Deal advances. . . ."

We realized what democracy meant and how it was used by the Guild in the free discussion on these resolutions. Heywood Broun rose from the floor to speak on a resolution to condemn Father Coughlin. "I would move to strike out that part of the resolution which asks the Catholic Church to put discipline on Father Coughlin. . . . I feel that a very bad precedent might be created. If the Catholic Church is going to crack down on a man whom I certainly regard as reactionary in his labor and political views, then you open the door to discipline on the part of many other Catholic clergymen who might be on the other extreme. . . ."

Jack Morris, a Chicago striker as big as Heywood and twice as voluble, arose.

"I must say I believe Mr. Broun's expressions are not based upon realistic experiences as a Catholic as mine have been over a period of many years. . . . I have stood on soap boxes and have been followed by speakers who happened to be of Jewish origin, speaking on much the same subjects as I,

and I have had to repulse the attacks of red-necked Irish-American Catholics. I happen to be one of genealogical strain, of that same group. Maybe my neck isn't so red."

We edged forward anxiously following the controversy.

The night before, Morris had taken Fred Vast, Bill Brownell, some other students at the University of California and the five of us out for some beer. He had proceeded to give us some hints about "how to be a newspaperman." A stranger wanted to learn too, but his eavesdropping combined a nasty manner of letting us know the Morris way was the wrong way to be a newspaperman. Morris bit his lips and ignored the kibitzer. Patiently. Until the fifth beer. Morris arose, grabbed the stranger by the collar, lifted him bodily and threw him out the door. The stranger objected. Morris swung once and did not miss. We ordered a sixth beer and listened to the Morris way of becoming newspapermen.

Broun rose slowly and walked to the front of the hall. "I know Jack Morris understands we speak exactly the same about Coughlin. . . . I do think it is bad for us to ask the Catholic Church to take action against Charles E. Coughlin."

Following Heywood's suggestion, the convention adopted the resolution ". . . that the American Newspaper Guild in convention condemns Father Coughlin as an enemy of progressive unionism, as a harbinger of fascism and would-be strikebreaker."

Last morning. Reluctantly, we took our places in the hall.

"The Chair apologizes," said Heywood. "It is three minutes after nine."

Order of business—election of officers.

The delegates cheered and applauded. Everyone knew Heywood Broun would be elected President, because everyone wanted him.

Next office, executive vice-president. . . . Milton Kaufman was elected. Other officers were elected. The losers congratulated the winners and everybody cheered.

Only a few more minutes remained to this union convention. We didn't want it to end.

Carl Randau, top-notch newspaperman, dignified and President of the New York Guild, asked for the floor.

"I want to say as a New Yorker and ex-Californian, I think we ought to have a rising vote of thanks to San Francisco, with only one qualification, and that is the entertainment here was so extreme that if there were one more day of it I don't believe the chairman and some others, including myself, could stand it."

Said Heywood Broun: "The Chair would like to add two sentences to what Carl Randau has said, that as a citizen of Connecticut he thinks California has a good climate and Sally Rand has a good restaurant."

The meeting was adjourned.

4

But there was one more day. We walked into Joseph Henry Jackson's office at the San Francisco *Chronicle* and told him we were writing a book.

"We're seeing America. Can you give us some ideas about the West?"

In shirt sleeves, he clasped his hands behind his head and looked sharply at us. He had ideas. He also had a brisk, almost rough way of voicing them. We marked him down as a good guy.

"This your first book?"

We nodded.

"Then you'll have to go to town on your own publicity. Publishers usually let a first book stand on its own merits.

. . . Well, you can start with San Francisco." He reached for the phone. "Hello? Desk? Send down a photographer and reporter. I've got a good story down in my office for you. Five young people from New York, seeing the country and writing a book. Okay? Fine."

The photographer and reporter came. We smiled and took a picture.

"Sure," said Joe in reply to the reporter. "We think 'Frisco is the best town we've hit so far."

The young reporter frowned. "You mean *San Francisco*, don't you?"

Joe's eyes widened. "What's the difference?"

"*San Francisco*, if you please," the reporter said pleasantly.

It was all right with us. We didn't care what people called New York, but why argue?

"Well, that's settled," Jackson said with finality. "Now you want some ideas about the West?"

He gave us ideas about Hollywood, agriculture, universities and people. "What else?"

"John Steinbeck," said we. "How can we get to see him?"

"Why do you want to see him?"

"We want to talk, show him some of the stuff we're writing, get some help. . . ."

"Uh-huh."

"We've been hearing silly stories about him, that mobs of ferocious dogs keep off visitors and all that."

Jackson laughed. "That's nonsense. Since he wrote *Grapes of Wrath* he's been hounded on every side. The Associated Farmers out here don't like to see the truth become so popular."

"We haven't been able to read that book yet," said Lillian, "but we will before we see him."

"So you're set on seeing him?"

"That's the idea. He's the best writer in the country. We're just beginners. He can help us."

Again Jackson smiled and reached for the phone. "Long distance. . . ." He got his party and talked for a while. Then he hung up and turned to us. "He's not at Los Gatos now. They tell me he's in Hollywood."

"Swell! We're going to Hollywood. Do you think he'll be there for a couple of weeks?"

"There's no telling, but I'll write ahead and tell him you're coming."

"Okay!"

We went directly to a book shop. "Got a copy of *Grapes of Wrath*?" We voted to go without lunch for two days to make up for the appropriation out of our shrinking treasury.

5

And what about other young people in California? The California Youth Legislature led them. State Director Clara Walldow, poised and self-confident, told us about it.

"Year after year, more young men and women pour out of schools. They want jobs, and the good things that come with jobs: recognition, recreation, the feeling that life is worthwhile."

The California Youth Model Legislature was a statewide organization of 181 youth organizations from 81 California communities. Represented in it were churches and farm groups, students and trade unions, political leagues and fraternal societies.

"The special needs of youth can and must be met. . . ." That sounded familiar to us. We knew something of the work of the American Youth Congress, but now we learned how state organizations affiliated with the Congress carried out the youth program.

The California Youth Commission bill had been introduced in the state legislature. It provided for necessary research into youth problems—answering the needs of experts for accurate, authoritative information. It would make for the co-ordination needed by the various youth-serving agencies of the state, now separated and sometimes working at cross-purposes.

The Apprentice Training Bill, also sponsored by the Youth Legislature, would give young people the opportunity to secure adequate training with fair wages and working conditions.

Clara showed us a program covering health protection, civil liberties, better housing, a program basing its strength and fulfillment on organized labor, a program young people require if they are to become strong, creative citizens in America. The California Youth Legislature was going strong.

We stayed with easy-going Fred Vast our last few days in San Francisco. Young Vast, brilliant student at the University of California, would write big things some day. All he needed was a break, and together with us he put his stock in the American Newspaper Guild for that break. He had reason to believe in labor; his father was a member of the Teamsters' Union.

"Sure," said Fred's father, "I'm a member of the A. F. of L., and Fred's in the Guild CIO. But we work together. We don't fight. We gain more that way. We're like all the members of both labor organizations."

"That's right," Fred added, placing an arm about his father. "They can't keep us apart, and they won't be able to keep the other members apart for long. We gain more that way," he repeated.

Young Fred Vast who wanted to write. Together, we had seen a union of writers at work. Together, we looked to that union for the fulfillment of our future.

Maybe this sounds like hero worship. It is. We believe that all people have heroes, but that only young people will admit having them. Sure, we're all for heroes, because we've got some genuine ones in the Newspaper Guild. We believe that most people fashion their lives after those of others, and we intend to use our heroes in the Guild as our particular models.

## *Chapter 5* FOLLOWING LEWIS AND CLARKE

☛ “We’re going into the wild woods of the Northwest, aren’t we?”

Well, Joe, George and Mel were going to grow beards. Besides, it took too much time to shave. Helen cajoled and ridiculed, but the beards grew and thickened. Nobody else in the whole Northwest seemed to have a beard, but nobody in the whole Northwest seemed to mind the three imported specimens. That’s how people were in Grants Pass, Eugene, Seattle and Yakima, and we liked them for it. They didn’t put on airs. They were not snobs or hypocrites.

Peaches were ripening in the orchards as we sped northward, up the Redwood Trail. Apricots, grapes and hops were ready for the picking, and the migrant workers in their decrepit Chevies and open tin lizzies kept us company on the road.

We didn’t know much about the workers who followed the crops up and down the West Coast. We had seen them

leaving their homes in Kansas and Colorado. We began to see the terrible reality of their lives as soon as we left San Francisco.

We saw large notices posted in general stores and gas stations.

HOP PICKERS WANTED

Men, women, and families desired

No Experience Necessary

Good camps

U.S. 101, where the redwoods meet the ocean, and migratory workers roam the highway. The first migrant we met was answering the call of the posted notices. He was a small fellow. He didn't look very menacing, although we had read in San Francisco papers of the menace of this "outside element in agriculture in California." He was thin and he looked tired. He was buying some gasoline when we stopped at a station. The attendant was arguing with him, and we couldn't help listening while we waited to have our own tank filled.

"Nineteen cents a gallon. I can't help what you thought. Everybody pays nineteen," the attendant said.

"It's only sixteen back there. Sixteen cents a gallon."

"Nineteen. Can'tcha read? It says right on the pump, nineteen. It's not my fault. I don't make the prices. Nineteen."

The small fellow put his head inside the window of his car, an old make we couldn't recognize. He must have been conferring with someone else. The attendant waved to us and said, "Be with ya in minute, bud." The little fellow

withdrew his head and counted some money into the hand of the station attendant. Then he drove away. There were eight people in his car.

"Fill it up," Mel said, as the attendant came over to our car.

"Sure thing. Boy, I wish everyone would say that. I have to spend hours with little guys like that who buy two or three gallons."

He filled the tank. George paid him.

"Where was that other fellow going?"

"North." He pointed to a replica of the sign we had seen in a general store. "Pickin' hops. The growers paste thousands of those things all over. Then they get twice as many workers as they need. That way they cut pay and make more money. Them suckers fall for it."

We passed the little fellow about ten minutes later. He was at the wheel, staring straight ahead. Neither he nor his companions looked at us as we drove by them. When we came into the timber land, outlying the giant redwood forests, we saw the charred stumps, lone posts and sickly weeds where once rich forests stood. They reminded us of the migratory workers who were being cut down and used up, like the trees.

We had another type of company on the road to the Northwest. Other people, who had answered the call of a different kind of notice. The Chambers of Commerce and travel agencies had sent out smooth circulars telling about the wonders vacationists might enjoy in the redwood country. Tanned couples in snappy, stream-lined roadsters bearing out-of-state license plates sped past us, while we sped past the slowly moving stream of little fellows in jalopies.

"UKIAH—gateway to the redwoods." The gas stations, houses, cabins and souvenirs became redwood gas stations,

redwood houses, redwood cabins and redwood souvenirs. We passed clearings, where trailers were parked. We drove reluctantly by a camp site, where a young girl in khaki breeches waved cheerfully, inviting us to stop.

We rode up the "Avenue of Giants," those tremendous oldsters that had calmly viewed the coming of the first pioneers, and still more stolidly watched the tourists hurry through. We passed within a hundred yards of the grandpappy of them all—the tree through which a car could be driven.

"Let's go," Helen urged. "It won't take long. It's just off the road."

"What do you think we are—tourists?" Mel asked scornfully. We saw and heard many admonitions for the care of the trees. Roadside warnings and forest rangers rebuked motorists who threw live cigarette butts out of car windows. A signboard woodsman on the wall of a general store said to a young boy, "These trees are yours. Take care of them." But careless motorists or campers had not been the only ones at fault.

Someone or something had depleted our forests, cutting down the trees indiscriminately and leaving ugly black stumps for tombstones. The lordly trees began to appear against a background of dark smokestacks. The red brick general merchandise store in Hopland was closed and boarded up, but a bright red A. & P. store stood across the street. The answer was sharply cut into every scarred tree and barren stump.

"Monopolies," Joe said. "Remember the Midwest? In the heart of the corn and wheat belt, the price of bread was as high as it is out here. It's crazy, but people go hungry on their own farms. Out here, it's just as crazy. Only a few people own the land, the timberland. So they rush to cut

down the trees and make as much money as they can. It makes me sick."

We were silent. Was the answer as simple as all that?

The tourist traders, too, were making money on the trees. Redwood cabins were twice as high-priced as ordinary cabins. We stopped, argued, and bargained several times before Helen finally placed her stamp of approval on a place of lodging for the night. We rented one large cabin, with two double beds and a cot. A curtain divided the room. We really didn't want to stop driving at all that night. The road curved its way through the trees, and the man-made automobiles seemed to be tiny shadows in the reflection of their own headlights. The trees loomed large, walling us in. We saw more stars this one night than in all our nights in Brooklyn, with the planetarium and its made-to-order stars thrown in for good measure. But danger lurked on the curving roads, and we stopped.

We carried in our luggage. We didn't talk. At first, we tried to kid each other about the beauty of this night. We joked about Jo, Bob, June, Jerry . . . and all the others who might have been with us. But the strain was too much. We gradually became quiet, and for the first time on the trip we went about our individual tasks, without discussing each move the other made. The beds were made, supper prepared, dishes washed, and then we wandered out, one by one, to look at the stars and feel our own individual insignificance.

"C'mon, you guys," called the ever-practical Mel. "We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow. Let's get to bed."

2

The shore of the Pacific Ocean broke the line of redwoods on the trail to Oregon. Rough, black cliffs resisted the hard

waves. Thin, gnarled trees replaced the red giants. The road, atop the cliffs, twisted along the shoreline.

We spent the day driving steadily, wondering at the beauty of this land. Our time-saving devices on the road were in singular contrast to all this magnificence. Helen made cheese sandwiches in the car while we drove, and we ate them and drank milk from the community bottle with our eyes turned out the windows. Mel, with one hand holding the wheel, the other holding a sandwich, guided the car around precarious curves. We were hungry for this beauty, but nothing could daunt our more worldly appetites. We were equally hungry for cheese sandwiches and milk.

Early in the evening we crossed into the state of Oregon. We searched out the cheapest tourist cabins in Grants Pass.

Thomas Ellington Grey, cabin proprietor, nearing seventy, reminded us of a petrified redwood. A farmer by birth, he had fought the earth and lost twice. The first time, his defeat did not break him. The second time, he opened a tourist camp. He peered at us over his horn-rimmed glasses.

"This here's a hundred per cent American town. No Jews, niggers, Sikhs, dagos, or Filipinos. Grants Pass is *American*."

"How did they vote here last year?"

"Republican. Didn't I tell you there were no Reds here? The trouble with the rest of the country is that the Jewish bankers run it." He spat. "And those agitators back East. D'you think we have any more labor trouble around here? Those racketeers used to send Jewish communists up to the mills to make the workers join unions." Mr. Grey's voice rose with the thermometer (now registering 102). "We wouldn't have none of it, so we ran them out of town on a rail."

"Hold on a minute," George said. "You just told us about the bankers being the Jews, and now you say the communists

are the Jews. But the communists are always attacking the bankers. It sounds funny to me."

"Well," bulky Mr. Grey declared, hooking his thumbs around his suspenders, "well, that's simple. Don't you see these Jews have an international organization to wipe out the white men? So they attack from both sides."

He snorted and spat again. "Young people expect too much today," he continued. "There's opportunity aplenty for them, but they can't see it. Too many of them want to be big before they become big themselves."

Two young fellows walked through the room and nodded sullenly.

"Those are my sons," he said. "Both of them were going to the University, studying law. But I had to pull them out. There's no money in seventy-five-cent cabins. There ain't a decent job left for a young man today."

After supper, we lethargically waited for the sun to disappear and the unbearable heat to become absorbed by the night. Unexpectedly, George began a report that proved to be the first of a series of all-night events.

"We've got to cut down on expenses," he began. We nodded mechanically at the familiar theme. George, however, was not to be put off this night. "And it might interest you to know"—he paused effectively, until we all paid attention—"to know that we've got enough money left now to leave us stranded in Uvalde, Texas!"

"Oh," Helen gasped.

Joe screwed up his face and waved an arm at Lillian. "You see? Now I'll probably never see my family again. I haven't written to them for a whole week. You've got to allot me enough for an airmail letter. I insist on it."

"Where's Uvalde?" Helen asked weakly.

"It's 'Cactus Jack' Garner's home town, right in the middle

of Texas. Now do you know why I vote against buying cigarettes?" said George.

Disconsolate, Joe reached for the cigarette roller. "I'm willing to smoke these. As a matter of fact, I don't have to smoke at all. I only started because you all smoked. But I've got to have a stamp for a letter home."

"Here." George gave him the stamp. "Now we don't have any more stamps left."

"Oh, stop worrying." Lillian's show of confidence always aroused skepticism, and this note of nonchalance in the midst of a realistic plight was the call to battle. George pulled out his little brown book of facts and figures.

"Whaddya mean, stop worrying? We've spent over twenty dollars the last two days. I'm the one that has to keep the accounts. I *have* to worry."

Lillian stretched out on the bed, reached for one of the cigarettes Joe had made.

"Ah, we're pampered paupers," she said.

Tempers shortened. Car fever all day, and cabin fever at night are common illnesses among fellow-travelers. The fever reaches its pitch when five people who have looked at each other for ten hours in a crowded car, start looking at each other again in a hot little cabin with flies, mosquitoes and miscellaneous bugs for company.

"Yeh, we're pampered, all right," Joe said, pacing up and down, "and I want to get home. George is right when he says we ought to save money."

"Everytime we have to eat lunch," George continued, raising his voice as a result of this new-found support, "Helen says, 'We ought to have a good, hot-cooked meal.' Every time we run out of cigarettes, Lillian says, 'I've got to have a cigarette.' It can't go on. It's got to stop."

"Well we've got to have the right sort of food. I don't

mind cooking, but we don't have the facilities to cook a good hot meal," the Food and Lodging Department spoke up in soft self-defense.

"But didn't you hear what George said? We've just got to cut down on expenses," Mel offered from the corner.

"No more cigarettes," George said. Then he added, hastily, "Of course, that's only my opinion. Let's take a vote."

Lillian puffed calmly, deliberately angering the others. "Where is your spirit of adventure? Suppose we do run out of money? So what?"

"Look at her laying there . . ." Joe began.

"*Lying* here," Lillian interrupted. "Suppose we do run out of money? Look at us. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. We've got a car, a good car. We know newspaper people in all the large cities. Why can't we have more adventure on this trip?"

"Adventure!" George was scornfully realistic. "Adventure is okay for Richard Harding Davis. Not for me."

"Suppose we do run out of money," Lillian persisted. "Why can't we go to work, washing dishes in order to eat from city to city? Look at all the kids on the road who have to live by picking up work wherever they can. And we're worrying! We can always write a little piece for a local paper and pick up enough money to move on."

"There she goes, placing us on the defensive," Joe said wildly. "It's some technique. *You're* supposed to be on the defensive."

"I want to know one thing. We're spending too much money. Are we going to cut down, or aren't we?" George sat down, exasperated.

Lillian sat up. "We're supposed to be writing a book. We promised to send rough drafts of the first few chapters back to the publisher. If the publisher likes them, we'll get

another fifty dollars. So let's finish them off tonight and send them East."

"Suppose he doesn't like them?"

"Then we don't get any money!"

"Adventure!" Joe mocked. "How about the adventure?"

"Let's get to work," Helen laughed, her eyes crinkling in the corners.

"We'll stay up all night," Lillian said.

"I'll draw up a financial report, showing how we spent the money and asking for more," George said. "But we've got to cut down anyhow."

"If we're going to stay up all night, we'll need cigarettes," Mel said. "I move we appropriate ten cents for a pack, just for tonight."

George began to object.

"We've got to stay awake to get out the stuff," Lillian reminded.

We settled down to work. Night came, and silence spread over the tourist camp. The two typewriters clattered to the rhythm of perking coffee. We wondered if the steady beat in the little cabin would awaken Thomas Ellington Grey. We drank coffee and smoked the ten-cent cigarettes, as we pounded out our story. Mel was the first to doze off after his four-hundred-mile day.

George retired to the next cabin, put his education in accounting and business to practical application, and drew up a financial report.

For the twenty-five-day period, ending this night of August 8, 1939 [the report began], despite penny-pinching and nickel-squeezing by the controller, and despite acceptance of every offer for free food and lodging, the financial condition of the Argonauts is pretty bad.

To date, we have spent the sum of \$213.87. . . . The average cost per person for the entire twenty-five days has been \$42.77. Broken down, this figure reveals that each person has spent \$.51 a day for food, \$.26 for lodging, \$.56 for the car, and \$.38 for miscellaneous items. The group spent only \$3.50 for beer and candy, most of that sum being spent in the process of gathering information. . . .

Excluding conditioning, tolls, parking fees and flat tires, the car expenses amounted to only \$43.06 for 3,840 miles into San Francisco, an average of 1.14 cents per mile. The other items boosted the average to 1.5 cents per mile.

While the financial state of the Argonauts is bad, their less mundane assets force me to recommend them as a good investment.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE WHITMAN

*Financial Department.*

More coffee and backaches. George and Helen soon drooped and dropped by the wayside. Joe and Lillian kept at the keys.

Dawn and yawns. Joe and Lillian out-boasted each other about how tired each was not. They finished the copy and, with a flourish, typed out envelopes for the material. Lillian woke Mel at seven.

"Let's get an early start," she said. "I'm going to take a shower."

She hurried off to the shower room, and twenty minutes later returned to find Joe wrapped in bed covers, sound asleep. She woke him with ruthless glee. At eight o'clock, we stopped in a "café" for breakfast.

The waitress told us about the "Cavemen," a secret society whose members grew beards and went around in bear skins. Each year the Cavemen had a large feast of raw meat.

"Raw meat?" George groaned. He decided to shave off his beard.

The waitress nodded and continued. "The Cavemen are also the town's Chamber of Commerce. They put on their skins, grab clubs and hold up railroad trains. They carry off half-nude young women to the feast. They ride all the union agitators out of town on a rail."

We left Grants Pass in a hurry. A gray mist settled over the old Lewis and Clarke trail. The odor of burning wood told us of the near-by Dutch Canyon forest fire. Combined with the heat, it made breathing hard. Then we came into cleanly designed farmland. Small plots of growing wheat, oats and corn lined the highway. Rainbow beds of flowers brightened the earth.

Oregon had a population of 983,786. "Enough to stick in Flatbush and have room for more," said George.

"It's crazy, simply crazy." Joe shook his head. "All those people crowding the tenements in New York, Chicago and other cities. And all this land going to waste."

Eugene, Oregon, was a college town, unlike any other we had visited. The university was its main support, but its streets seemed to be peopled with the western "cowboys" of the movies. We entered a small lunch shop on a side street and sat down at the counter, next to heavy men in overalls and high boots. We glanced at the menu. T-bone steak dinner—25 cents. Because we thought we were dreaming, we asked the proprietor how he managed to serve such large dinners for such low prices.

"Competition." He smiled bitterly.

As we strolled down the street after lunch, a man with a microphone was sounding out public opinion on a corner. He was selling the best soap in all the world, and because people in the street listened to him tell about this wonderful soap, he gave them the opportunity to say what they thought about a list of questions in his hand.

We edged up to the circle of folks waiting to go on the radio. Does Eugene need a public swimming pool? Well, sure, everybody knows we need a pool. Keep kids off the street. Give people work to build it. It'd be a relief, too, on darn hot days like these. But, the announcer says playfully, taxes would have to pay for it. Nothing but right, public opinion comes back at him, them as can pay for it should pay. Rich folks should pay more taxes than poor folks for the swimming pool.

A question is put to a small, dry man wearing a white suit. Should Harry Bridges, the CIO leader, be deported? He's not a citizen, you know. That requires thought.

"Wa-a-al, I'll tell ya, mister," the small man answers slowly, "lots of people get excited about other people they call 'furriners' or 'agitators.' Now don't mistake me, mister, I'm not a radical. I don't know whether Bridges is a communist or not, but whatever a man thinks, he's got a right to say it in this country. I don't think we ought to make him get out."

All right, all right, sir, thank you very much, and don't forget that wonder soap.

Next question. Will there be a war?

"Yes," a young woman with a sharply pointed nose says. "Yes, there'll be a war over in Europe, and I hope we stay out of it."

3

We sped north, hoping to make Portland by nightfall. A worn and faded sign near the roadside startled us—BRING PROSPERITY BACK WITH THE TOWNSEND PLAN. We learned that in spite of the fact that Townsend had passed out of the national picture, a new and vigorous old-age-pension movement had arisen. That's the way the things were. Individuals arose to bring ideas and movements to the people, but when they no longer served the needs of the people, they were forgotten. New movements arose with new leaders. Only the red earth of the region, and the tall thick trees, remained unchanged. And even these were controlled by men.

Out of the tall trees and numerous gas stations, Portland came into view on the trail of huge Bonneville power lines. Its tall smokestacks seemed to compete with the forest fires raging about twenty-five miles away. We rented cabins and decided to go swimming in the Columbia River.

CAUTION  
Deep Holes  
Swim at Your Own  
RISK

We stopped the car and asked a chubby blond kid on a bicycle about the sign.

"Naw, it's not dangerous."

We prepared to drive on.

"A coupla people drowned there lately," the youngster added as an afterthought.

We didn't care. We swam recklessly over the deep holes, glorying in the coldness of the water. Our dispositions improved. We returned to the tourist camp to upset the whole routine of the other guests. We sang loudly in the shower rooms. We appropriated five wash tubs in the laundry room and soaked and scrubbed socks and blouses. Joe and George shaved off the uneven soft growth under their chins. Only Mel, who could boast of a real black bristle, continued to pose as a wild he-man. Helen opened six cans, and we had a feast. We emerged clean and shining in freshly pressed clothes. We were tired but cheerful.

We headed straight for the *Oregonian*, Portland newspaper. "Go to city rooms," Jay Franklin had advised. "Visit newspapers for leads to information." In the *Oregonian's* city room, Fred Colvey rested his large brown-topped head and forearms on his typewriter.

"Say, there's one guy you ought to see," he said. "He's an Indian, Chief Red Cloud of the Kickawa tribe. Came in here today and said in three years the 30,000,000 Indians in North America are going to throw out the white men. He thinks Hitler has done a lot of good by popularizing the swastika and the upraised hand. Right now he's suing the government over some land which he says they confiscated up at Grand Coulee. He claims they violated the treaty of 1850."

Chief Red Cloud, we learned, was E. A. Towner, a member of the Oregon bar and a half-breed Siletz who calls himself "a genuine Indian." According to his legend, thousands of years ago Wantatonka, the Great Spirit, warned the Indians against an evil race, the "Chulthnaugen" or Jews.

"Some day," according to the Chief's story, "there will be a great conflict of philosophies in this world. On one side will be the Indians and Germans, while on the other side will be the Jews and their friends. Wantatonka sent over into

the body of Der Fuehrer the soul of a great Indian medicine man. That is why Adolf Hitler's government is established on an Indian model and according to Indian principles."

"He's some character," Colvey said.

"Do people fall for that stuff?"

"Sometimes," the young reporter smiled. "Towner goes from reservation to reservation, making speeches. But most Indians don't think much of him. The two tribal councils in Oregon, the Warm Springs and the Grande Ronde-Siletz, have passed resolutions lambasting his activities."

"How do people in the state react to movements like those?" we asked. Colvey grinned again. "Maybe you ought to ask them, but if you want an objective newspaperman's opinion, I'll tell you about the anti-picketing law passed by the people in an initiative movement recently. You know what that is? Labor loses its right to picket. It's pretty vicious, and now it's being copied in other states. The CIO was able to beat it in Washington and California. But it passed here."

4

"Going to Seattle?" we had been asked.

"Uh-huh."

"Look up Howard Costigan. He's the Executive Secretary of the Washington Commonwealth Federation. Don't miss him."

Costigan and the city of Seattle—a real he-man leader of the great Northwest, and a city of the pioneers remote from Eastern cosmopolitanism. Our imaginations worked overtime.

Seattle had chain stores, tall buildings and telephone booths! We scoffed at our own naïveté and resigned our-

selves to the fact that all American cities look alike. We called Howard Costigan.

"C'mon over," he said. "No, wait a minute, you'd better meet me at the broadcasting studio. I go on the air at 4:45."

We shook hands at 4:42 (Helen had phoned relatives in the interim and made arrangements for dinner), and sat down in the studio to listen to the broadcast. A Western double for Orson Welles, large and talkative, he seemed to look straight through us with his sharp little eyes. Then he turned to watch the large clock. He had another minute before going on the air.

We listened to the broadcast and thereafter listened for four straight days—and nights! We learned about the Washington Commonwealth Federation, and as Howard Costigan, its Executive Secretary, talked about it, we forgot to keep track of time.

We sat around the microphone as he began to broadcast.

"... Without any conceivable justification, and with alarming danger to the life of democracy itself, America's privileged families and their Congressional henchmen wiped out the three-billion-dollar program of highways, hospitals and housing which would have stimulated production and provided, directly and indirectly, employment for at least two million breadwinners."

We told Costigan we were from the East.

"We're trying to win the West back for the Westerners," he said.

Maybe he thought we were Wall Street emissaries. So we told him about buying our slinky car on the installment plan, cooking cereal on our portable gasoline stove, doling out cigarettes, and not having any jobs. He took the steely look reserved for Associated Farmers and the Congressmen who had voted the cuts in WPA out of his eye. He talked. He

made us open our mouths and keep silent. Have you ever read Thomas Wolfe? That was Costigan—with one important difference. The flow of powerful, colorful, streaming language had political direction and purpose—the achievement of security, i.e., “shoes and sheets and shirts,” for the people. “Democracy must feed the people’s stomachs, before fascism empties their heads,” he said.

So he was a colorful, effective “people’s politician.” What were we getting so excited about? He was not the only one. No, but there was only one Washington Commonwealth Federation. Every word in the preamble to its platform meant something to us.

“The people of the United States have a proud heritage of democracy and an undying hope for social justice and economic well-being. Today, powerful and sinister forces living by special privilege threaten this American heritage. . . .”

The program: Social Security. Keeping America out of war. Public ownership of natural resources and public utilities. Civil rights for all social, racial, religious and economic groups. Union standards of wages for labor. Guarantees to the farmer. Public housing. Public health protection and free medical services. Protection of the consumer from monopoly prices. More adequate educational opportunities. Opportunities for youth. Taxation according to the ability to pay.

Radical? Impossible? Foreign? Well, Howard Costigan’s father had the first drugstore in the city of Seattle. His grandfather founded the first shingle mill. So they can’t tell him to take the platform and go back where he came from. If they do tell him that, Howard Costigan takes that platform to the people of the Northwest. It is theirs. We saw the people who work day and night to make the WCF

even stronger and larger than it is. We talked to the lumber workers, young folks, old folks, housewives, the unemployed, and the college professors. They want that platform.

After the radio broadcast, we went over to the WCF offices with Costigan. We trailed after him, down a narrow corridor. As we entered Costigan's office, a slim, blonde girl handed us a paper bag filled with buttons. "Defend Harry Bridges" buttons, she explained. "Here, take them, I'm going out now. Sell them to your friends. Return the money here. G'by." We said thanks and, holding the buttons uncertainly, settled ourselves on the desk and chairs in the crowded office.

"Some young folks from New York. They're writing a book," Costigan explained to a slim man wearing a checkered sweater and smoking a pipe. "This is Terry Pettus, the editor of the *New Dealer*."

"Howdyado. Glad to know all of you." Pettus shook hands and grinned without removing his pipe.

"Writers, huh? Do a story for our next issue?"

"Sure."

"Tell about your impressions of the Northwest. Can't pay you," he warned. "I'll give you a subscription to the *New Dealer* instead. No money, you know."

"Well, what do you want to know?" Costigan looked quickly at each of us. "I've got a meeting in a few minutes. We'll start now and make an appointment to see each other again."

We started. We wanted to know what the WCF was doing. Why was it organized? Who belonged? How did you join? Why was it so hot in Seattle? Were young people and students in the WCF?

What was the Washington Commonwealth Federation

doing? He answered that by telling us about what it had done already—its record. They had rallied all the people in the state to beat back the anti-picketing law. The WCF was one effective medium through which 250,000 members and thousands of other followers combated reaction in all guises. They prepared for elections (and he meant *prepared*) through efficient pre-primary activity, in order to win Democratic Party nominations for progressives. Real labor unity had been established in Seattle, because the rank-and-file union members who belonged to the WCF or supported its program were strong enough to come together despite the efforts of some leaders to keep them apart.

The WCF represented the members of affiliated trade unions, political and peace groups, old-age-pension unions, Workers' Alliance and farm organizations, and it enabled these people to make themselves heard on Election Day particularly, and all year round generally. Not only members of organizations belonged to the WCF. Individual memberships were available, too, but it didn't take long for a WCF member to find himself an organization. The WCF is life itself in Washington. We were to hear much of it.

## 5

Twelve years before, in Syracuse, Uncle Gabe got a notion he wanted to live where the air was clear, and he upped and sold his coal company. Lillian and Helen had not seen him since.

"Too many people around here," he had claimed, and that was all. Aunt Bertha and the numerous cousins had objected. They liked Syracuse.

"You don't have to come with me," he told them.

He packed his own belongings and settled in Seattle. Aunt

Bertha and some of the cousins followed. There Lillian and Helen found them, in the backyard of their small house, waiting for the five Argonauts to come and eat a kettle-full of lamb chops. Aunt Bertha bustled about, trying to make us eat more than we wanted to eat. Uncle Gabe sat at the head of the long table outdoors ("It's too hot to eat in the stuffy dining room"), puffed on his pipe and looked us over carefully. He was seventy years old and bright as ever. Cousin Ray, the youngest and a senior at the University of Washington, sat on the side lines, somewhat hostile to the five "smart-alecks" who acted as if they owned the country.

"So you're writing a book," Uncle Gabe began. "What's it going to say?"

"Let them eat. They haven't eaten since they left home. Talk later." Aunt Bertha was an understanding, practical and firm woman.

We finished the lamb chops and started on succulent slices of watermelon.

"What kind of book are you writing?" Uncle Gabe again ventured.

"Gabe, wait. They're starved. Can't you see? Save the talk for after dinner. The poor things, they're starved." Aunt Bertha had enjoyed a reputation in Syracuse for being the best cook and dinner-party-giver in the city.

Uncle Gabe long ago had learned how to be a patient man. He waited. Coffee and cake were served.

"All right, now tell me. . . ."

"Gabe."

"They're only drinking coffee! Let them tell me about the book. How often do I have the chance to talk to five authors? They're writing a book!"

"Book or no book. They've got to eat first. Even if you're writing a book, you've got to eat."

We ate. Finally, we told Uncle Gabe we were writing a book about America.

"What are you saying about America?"

"Oh, everything . . ." we answered with the recently acquired vagueness of authors reluctant to give details of their own work.

"What's everything?" Uncle Gabe persisted.

"Everything we see, hear, do, and feel about the country. Everything that's important to us."

"All right. Be honest in what you say. That's all that matters."

That's all that mattered in Uncle Gabe's life. He had devoted most of his seventy years to studying and reading and discussing—in an effort to "be honest." He called himself a "socialist," but he was not a member of any political party. He had read Karl Marx in the original German in his native country, and he had come to Syracuse to shock people with the idea that a man should receive the full value of his labor on pay day. He relied on argument to bring out the truth, and then he expected all men to "be honest" and do the right thing. His idealism made us feel uncomfortable, and we could not help comparing him with a practical realist like Howard Costigan.

"I'm willing to learn," he told us, when the arguments started. "Prove that I'm wrong." He took the pipe out of his mouth and pointed it at us. "But there's only one thing I ask. Stick to facts, that's all."

We debated with him for almost a week. Ray sat by and listened, saying little. Uncle Gabe came to the union meetings and picnics we attended, hiding in out-of-the-way corners, until we were ready to go home. Then he would tell us what he thought.

"So they want security. Suppose they get their pensions. What will it mean? No, you have to change everything, the whole system, not one or two or ten little things."

One night Mike was with us. Mike, a longshoreman, had been a "Wobbly"—a member of the Industrial Workers of the World. He had worked in every large harbor in the United States, and had been one of the first to refuse to cross a picket line at the harbor where a Japanese ship lay waiting to be loaded with scrap iron. The picket line had been called by the American League for Peace and Democracy. Hundreds of longshoremen refused to load the ship because, as union members, they "could not cross a picket line."

Mike and Uncle Gabe did battle while we refereed. We had learned something about the IWW—the "Wobblies"—in our American history classes; not much, but something. We had never met one until now. We had memorized the following: "The IWW had been militant and revolutionary but anarchistic and ineffective." We wondered about ex-Wobbly Mike.

"You have to change the whole system." Uncle Gabe sat back stoically, smoking his pipe. "You can't put a little patch here and there on the capitalist system."

"Why don't you come down to a meeting of my union and tell that to the boys?" Mike proposed softly.

"Because I'm retired. I don't make speeches any more." Uncle Gabe spoke heavily, in a deep accent. "If I made speeches, I'd educate the people for socialism. You're wrong. Either you must have capitalism or socialism. There's no in-between."

"Ain't longshoremen good enough for socialism?" Mike grinned. Then his tanned face grew serious and he scratched his head.

"Maybe I agree with you. Socialism is a good thing. But how are you going to get it?"

"I believe that you can explain to the people what socialism means. That's enough. They'll see that it's right. That's all you have to do."

Mike lit a cigarette. We waited silently for him to answer.

"Tell that to my boys. You know what they'll say?"

"No."

"They'll say you're nuts. You can't come to a union meeting and start talking fancy language. The boys aren't interested in mere words. Sure they want to learn, but they're fighting like the devil for higher wages, for labor unity, for protection of the right to strike. They're fighting to keep out of war."

Uncle Gabe was offended. He had read Goethe, Heine, Engels, Marx and Schopenhauer. All his life he had searched for the truth.

"All right, what do you have to do then?" he asked.

"Get the people organized, the workers in the trade unions, the young ones in youth organizations, the old in old-age-pension unions, the little businessmen against the big monopolies. Get them organized and fighting. Get them working with each other in political federations like the Washington Commonwealth Federation. You can't talk so much in days like these. You've got to *do* more."

Uncle Gabe smiled. "Maybe I'm too old. I'm an old man, living with books too much. Maybe talking is easier than fighting."

We didn't know what to say. Helen finally suggested that we go home and get some sleep.

## 6

"THEY COVER THE UNITED STATES";  
CITY EDITOR, STAFF TAKE TO ROAD

Back Seat of Car Editorial Room  
For 5 Writing Book

"'But,' observed one of the group, 'the chapter dealing with the Northwest will be the *meatiest* of them all. . . .'"

Slim Lynch, one of the Seattle Newspaper Guild delegates to the Convention, took our picture for this *Post-Intelligencer* story. A Guild member wrote the article. Bob Camozzi, ANG officer, in whose house we slept one night, supervised the circulation of the paper—with that story in it. We had still another reason for our great interest in the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*. That reason was Anna Roosevelt Boettiger, tall blonde associate editor. We trooped into her tiny office. She greatly resembled her mother, the First Lady of the Land. All the Newspaper Guild members on her own paper and union men throughout the city stood by her. We understood why when she began to speak.

"It's the hardest thing for people in the East to realize that we in the West don't vote for a political party. The people out here have never been interested in the name of a party. It's the issues that count."

We asked about those issues.

"The Wages and Hours law is bogging down," she said, "because there is no one to enforce it. The same is true of WPA. The Washington Commonwealth Federation has done one of the few good organizational political jobs in seeing that these issues are not dissipated."

Unionism?

"I believe one hundred per cent in organization. The Guild is preventing a lot of sweating and, with proper adjustment, will certainly improve reporting standards. However, there is still much to be done among other workers. Take the cannery workers, for instance; 95 per cent of mothers working in the canneries are separated from their husbands or have fatherless children. The children are tied to a post until the mothers get home from work. Something must be done for these people, not only to better their working conditions, but to prevent juvenile delinquency. We must build more playgrounds and nurseries."

"Yes," she continued, "Seattle could be a very lively city. But you have a bunch of reactionaries—people who made millions in lumber three generations ago—now sitting around in their clubs, saying, 'You can't do anything about the country. It's going to the dogs. Wait until the Republicans come into power.'"

After we had returned to New York City, we received a letter from Anna Roosevelt Boettiger. ". . . I am glad that you have chosen 'peace and the opportunity to live decently and happily' as the theme for your book, and am particularly delighted that after seeing so much of this country and so many of its people you seem to have such a strong feeling of optimism and the worthwhileness of working for these things. I hope your book will have a wide circulation, particularly among young people, as there are so many today who have been discouraged, and who, in order to succeed in the long run, must keep an optimistic vision for the future in front of them."

Mrs. Boettiger was one good cause for our optimism. The student body at the University of Washington was another.

Cousin Ray, who worked for the campus newspaper, told us the students were preparing now to work against the

involvement of our country in war. "They start early here," he said. "They don't take any chances."

He showed us a copy of the University of Washington *Daily*. An advertisement announced the revival of the moving picture *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

War Clouds Gather  
Nations Prepare  
How Do YOU Feel?

Do you know what war is REALLY like?  
—war stripped of its glamour—war  
bared as the wrecker of humanity. . . .

We went over to the campus to talk to the students.

Visitors to New York City stand beneath the Empire State building, craning their necks and whistling to show their wonder. We merely planted ourselves in the center of the University of Washington and compared it with the concrete campuses from which we had come.

The washrooms in any college are better than railroad smokers, if you want to hear what people think about politics, or almost anything. The women's rest room at the University of Washington was not unlike that of Hunter College. The girls powdered their noses, applied lipstick carefully, and confided I-don't-know-why-I-go-out-with-him-anyway-he's-no-fun-always-wants-to-sit-around-and-talk. Through the mirrors, they told Helen and Lillian what they thought about this country.

The University offered us a good cross-section of opinion. Students there, we learned, came older. Sometimes they attended for six and eight years before they got their degrees. The majority worked and went to school at the same time. Many of the students belonged to trade unions, and

about 7,000 out of the 11,000 enrolled were voters. And the trustees were worried about them.

They were still talking about Professor Laski, an English economist, whom the trustees invited to give a series of lectures. Thousands came to hear him, and thousands were turned away from the crowded auditorium. Laski talked about the wrong kind of economics, the Marxist kind. The trustees received complaints from local businessmen. So the trustees decided to bring another lecturer to the University who might make them forget what Laski had told them. They invited Vilhjalmur Stefansson, one of the world's leading Arctic explorers. The guest devoted most of his lecture to lauding the Soviet Union for its scientific work in the polar regions. The Board of Trustees held a conference and decided to try again. This time they invited a Frenchman to talk about art. Art, after all, was a rather ethereal subject. But the Frenchman spent his time analyzing art as a social medium for the transmission of great ideas, political as well as aesthetic.

The student body knew how to deal with pro-war groups, according to Bill "Cossy" Costello, a friend of Cousin Ray's. A super "pay-tree-ot," he told us, had organized a militaristic youth group on the campus called the "American Drums." The drums were too weak to stand the hammering of ridicule and opposition of the student body. A counter-organization was immediately established, calling itself "America's Bugles" with Archangel Gabriel as National Commander. The anti-war students rented the Music Hall and were going to put on a play—"America's Drums Roll On." The movement of ridicule swept through the school. Students would sidle mysteriously up to one another and hiss dramatically: "Get the word from Gabriel; then we march." The American Drums were dead in no time.

Industry still had to be built up in the Northwest. Cossy told us that was the first thing he had learned in his economics course. Fishing, lumber, mining and shipping were not enough. Through the Washington Commonwealth Federation, Cossy and other young people asked that the government take over public utilities and railroads, that the government sponsor Western industry. They didn't want their cow—whose head was feeding in the pastures of the Northwest—to be milked by Wall Street in the East. Moreover, they asked for a greater voice in government, for the right to vote at the age of eighteen. They asked that the government open land to them on the old homestead basis. The WCF had succeeded in electing a number of young state legislators, and the trade unions were led and supported by young men.

Herbert Hoover once told youth something like this: There is plenty of opportunity here; look at all the men who have jobs. When they die, you young people will take their places.

President Roosevelt once told the people:

What do the people of America want more than anything else? In my mind two things: Work, work, with all the moral and spiritual values that go with work, a reasonable measure of security—security for themselves and for their wives and children. Work and security—these are more than words. They are the spiritual values, the true goal toward which our efforts of reconstruction should lead.

But we found the words of both men equally helpful to the young people in need of jobs. The "employment agency" at the University can't fool them. We talked with Norman Hillis, in charge of the office. Wearing clothes of about

four different colors, he tossed back his near-shaven head and expounded: "Why we don't have enough fellows to *fill* the jobs. Don't look now, but in the next room an employer is interviewing four undergraduates for jobs for next spring."

He was obsessed with a pioneering spirit. "Anyone can get a job, or better yet, start his own business here. All you need is a little bit of the pioneering spirit, five dollars, and you can have a diaper service going full blast. Kind of messy, but it's a business, and you're a capitalist. Two seniors started one last fall and now are making \$350 a week out of it. Of the students here, 70 per cent are working their way through, and practically all the graduates have jobs. Anyone who really *wants* one, can have it. Journalism is about the only field that's overcrowded."

After leaving Mr. Hillis, we spoke to several of the boys in the anteroom. George asked them about possibilities in the diaper business.

"It stinks. No jobs, unless you want to work for ten bucks a week, and at anything but what you're interested in. Half the last class is still walking around."

Maybe we were becoming prejudiced. But we were learning new things every day—things that made us wonder about right and wrong, things like the "Filipino problem."

How did they live—these little people, whose skin coloring differed from ours and who spoke a different language? They were accepted only in the worst boarding houses and flops. They were isolated from white workers, and because of the scarcity of Filipino women in these states, many of them were driven to drugs and drinking. White women who ventured to speak with the Filipinos were frightened with horror stories about rape, seduction and violence.

We learned that the Filipinos had been intimidated by

the owners of the canneries, that they had been forced to work under unbearable conditions for little pay. Then they organized a union. A labor leader told us:

"Today, organized into the UCAPAWA [United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America], the Filipino cannery labor in the Northwest has become an integral part of American organized labor, has greatly raised the standard of living, helped considerably in preventing the employment of scabs, enemies of organized labor, and out of all this there has arisen a new problem."

A Filipino worker sitting in a small diner at the wharves told us about this new problem:

"We organized the union and took the white workers into our union, into our CIO. Now the cannery owners are encouraging the white workers in a campaign to deport us. They say we take away their jobs. We organized the union," the Filipino repeated. "They murdered our leaders and beat us, but we organized. Now they want to make us get out."

Proof that the Filipinos were not seriously competing with American labor was that the CIO unions along the Pacific Coast were aggressively organizing Filipino workers. The CIO insisted on the unity of all workers, regardless of race, creed or color.

We were prejudiced against race prejudice. People who brought up questions like the shape of a man's nose or the inflection in his voice usually turned out to oppose the thing the man really stood for. We walked along the wharves, and we saw white, brown and black men working together. They were organized in a strong union. People who would divide them against each other would be able to lower wages and make bigger profits.

The friction was sharp in Seattle, and the people on both

sides of the fence were organized. On the one side, the Washington Commonwealth Federation and all the organizations and unions affiliated with it. On the other side, the big farmers and landowners, canners and processors.

7

We drove north on the weekend to see the land and Grand Coulee Dam. Cousin Ray, who came with us, owned a Ford, vintage 1928, and when he took over the wheel of our car, he drummed up the speedometer to 80 m.p.h. Mel, in the back seat for the first time since we left home, went to sleep. Going north, the land and skies changed. We passed forests, still untouched except for the ravages of fires. We saw wigwam-shaped stacks of wheat and red rectangles of hay stacked in the fields. Coming into the mountain areas, we saw strings of little blue-green lakes surrounded by walls of rock. We wondered how the land got this way.

"Glacier," Joe informed. Glacier? Was that all? We had to laugh. Man spends thousands of days, millions of pounds of energy, and hundreds of years of study to learn how to *create* or buy beauty. Why don't they take a good look at America? Beauty is free. You don't have to pay for the glacier that swept over the land so long ago.

Soap Lake was one of the glacier's freaks. "A place to get healthy from" by plastering the coal-black mud found at the river bottom all over your body. Fat people sat around covered with the gooey stuff. A girl with bright red hair walked past our parked car. She told us if you dry your hair in the sun after getting Soap Lake water over it, it (the hair) turns red. Ray decided to try it. He waded out ankle deep, and scooped up water on his hair. He returned triumphantly.

"Take a good look," he advised. "This is the last time you'll see me in my natural, black curly locks."

Two hours later, washing for lunch, he wet his hair, and had a mass of suds instead of red curls. A glacier certainly could do some wonderful things.

But we found man-made science and engineering even more thrilling. High up in northeastern Washington, men were building a source of strength and power to aid the farmers. Where glaciers gnashed into the mountains and left valleys for cavities, where the sun beat down on almost arid land, men were building something big and magnificent. They were doing the work of another glacier, changing the face of the earth for hundreds of miles around. Built and controlled by men, Grand Coulee was the biggest engineering feat in the world. When it is completed, it will bring irrigation to 1,200,000 acres of land, and small but workable land holdings to thousands of families.

In the Bureau of Reclamation office, we looked out the window. The Columbia River hurtled over the yet-unfinished spillways. Four hundred million dollars was being spent on that river, to divert it from its present course. Thousands of years ago, the glacier did all that work for nothing. But men couldn't control a glacier, nor could a glacier bring water power for irrigation and electricity for factories and lights.

We sat in one of the little vistas and watched Grand Coulee at work. Tons of cement, steel trestles, whistling and hammering machines, men in protective helmets. In 100-degree heat, the tiny figures crawled up and down the concrete walls. Beyond the huge structure, the desert land stretched for miles. Could that be a Dust Bowl jalopy in the distance? Forty thousand families, landless, dust-driven, American stock looking for homes and a decent life. Maybe

it was a dream—the American dream of home, security and peace.

We headed back toward Seattle, impressed with the magnificence of the dam, but wondering why people couldn't have their lives molded to the same scientific perfection as the project itself. This time we took a different road, one that took us into Yakima, stronghold of the Associated Farmers in the large apple and pear district. In the center square of the city stood a stockade—"America's first concentration camp," it was called. There migratory workers and transients had been held as "vagrants," and forced to work in the fields at miserable wages. Yakima's chief of police was a member of the Silver Shirts, a fascist organization.

We stopped at cabins outside the city. There were a number of young fellows at the place, almost all of them under twenty-one. They rented the cabins by the week. Three from Atlantic, Iowa, had traveled 1,800 miles out to the West "looking for adventure and a job" in an old Ford that couldn't be expected to go much farther. They had got jobs in the Sears-Roebuck store and were about to be laid off.

Another boy had run away from a CCC camp near the Canadian border. He had seen a nineteen-year-old fellow blow himself to bits with dynamite. It had been an accident. The dead boy's arm had been found three days later. The officers had joked about it, asked the boys whether they wanted it in their soup that night for supper. The commanding officer was a pervert; if you didn't act nice to him, you were kicked around. The boy gave us the story in bits. He didn't seem to want to talk about it.

"We'll have four Washington tax tokens and a week's

salary," one of them, a blond-haired youth named Ross, remarked. "Then we'll try to make California and get jobs in the fields. I don't know how we'll live. I suppose the only time we'll get jobs is when the guys holding them die off."

We sat on the front porch of the boys' cabin early Sunday morning, before departing for Seattle. The five Argonauts, Cousin Ray, and the three fellows, all of us from different parts of America. Ross told us his grandfather had made quite a stake in Iowa, which his father had followed up with success. Then came the 1929 crash and the drought. The crash took the family's money, and the drought took the good topsoil off their land.

"You can't get anything to do in the whole state of Iowa. I tried. I wanted to go to the University and study civil engineering. Guess I'll never get the chance now."

Ross's friend spoke up. He had black hair and a sharp jaw. "Sure, you'll get a chance. A lot of people will be killed off soon. Those bastards will get us into a war, and the suckers will have to fight it for them. You'll get a chance if you don't get killed off first."

Ross nodded at his friend's remarks. "It's past me. Either we starve or get killed. That's a crazy reason to be born in the first place."

We showed them a pamphlet we had picked up in Seattle, called "After Graduation—WHAT? . . . A Job?" published by the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

"The unions are to blame!" shout the open-shop employers! Blaming the other fellow has always been an easy thing to do. But what are the facts? A young man gets out of school and goes to the factory for a job; the

big-hearted employer tells him he'd "like" to give him a job . . . BUT

The unions have monopoly on jobs, etc. . . . thus trying to turn youth against unionism.

Are there jobs? Yes, plenty. There's much to be done to make this country of ours an even better place to live in. Homes have to be built, slums cleared away. . . .

Arrayed against the youth, the entire people and the trade unions, stand the open-shop, monopolistic interests. To defend themselves, the people, the trade unions and America's younger generation must stick together.

There's a big job before us. It's a great job. It requires that good old pioneer spirit of boldness and courage. The young people of America have the stuff that it takes. The International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union extends its hand of friendship to the graduating class of 1939 and to the younger generation of America. Let's pull together!

We wondered just how closely the Silver Shirts worked with the big farmers and owners of canneries in Yakima Valley. Both tried to keep the agricultural workers from exercising their right to vote. After the fruit-picking season ended, these workers spilled over into the Puget Sound area for clam digging. The unions were working hard trying to organize them. The Silver Shirts and the Associated Farmers were working hard trying to keep them separated.

It was late afternoon when we stopped at Glenwood Park, a few miles out of Seattle, for the Workers' Alliance picnic. For five consecutive hours, we had been drinking in the beauty of the state. Mount Rainier, topped with snow, rose up to meet us as we traveled down the valley, past

countless orchards laden with pears and apples. The sun was bright and hot. The unemployed, the aged, the youth and the leaders of the Washington Commonwealth Federation were having fun when we reached the picnic.

We drank root beer and ate popcorn. We pounded nails into hard lumber and pushed each other to the sky in swings. We put nickels on roulette wheels, but didn't win any of the prize books. We watched the baseball game, and applauded a skinny, red-haired lad who won the potato sack race. We had fun and gathered with the others to hear the speakers. These people seemed to enjoy combining their fun with learning. Learning to them was important fun.

There were many speakers. Bob Camozzi of the Newspaper Guild. William Pennock, twenty-four-year-old leader of the Old Age Pension Union, a Phi Beta Kappa and member of the state legislature. Terry Pettus, editor of the *New Dealer*. The chairman of the Harry Bridges Defense Committee.

Howard Costigan drove his points home so that we remembered them. He talked, and it was not his voice alone we heard. It was the voice of the migratory workers, the trade union members, the Filipinos, the youth, the students, the unemployed, the small and landless farmers, the people on relief and the people without homes or food.

He invited us to his house that night. Terry Pettus and his wife were there. Costigan talked and occasionally, for confirmation of some of his statements, threw out questions to invisible Mrs. Costigan in the next room. Presently, she emerged with some knitting, a charming, blonde Mrs. Costigan.

The Yakima Chamber of Commerce, newspaper owners, railroads, and big utilities and banks stood behind the Asso-

ciated Farmers here. They were afraid the migratory workers would become organized, so they kept the workers in filthy labor camps. Among the migratory workers were children three years old who hadn't had a bath since birth. We listened until the grayness through the windows told us it was morning.

The night before we left Seattle, we attended a meeting of the Seattle Newspaper Guild (wherefrom we emerged with another ten dollars for our treasury). Ray had been with us. By this time he had warmed up considerably and was all set to organize associate members of the Guild at the University. After the meeting, we adjourned with Costigan to a nearby restaurant. Hamburgers, spliced with onions, warmed us to the combat, and we *talked back* to Howard Costigan. Politics, economics, philosophy, leaders. . . .

"A leader," he said, "can never rise above the masses, if he is to be *their* leader. He is a product of the masses of people, and he must constantly identify himself with their problems, their way of living, their aims."

Howard Costigan is that kind of leader.

8

On our way south to Portland again, we stayed long enough to get haircuts. In the beauty parlor Lillian had first turn. "Just a neat trim." Helen talked, not passing up any opportunity to find out what Portland people were like. The beauty expert was a young girl, interested in entering the University in the fall, and joining a sorority, and working her way through by cutting hair. That was very interesting, and Helen talked some more. The girl snipped away at Lillian's hair. Helen talked. Lillian listened and forgot

to watch the mirror. The talk faded out, and Lillian looked in the mirror.

"Migosh, I'm clipped. Where's my hair?"

The young beauty expert seemed a little frightened. "It's nice that way, even all the way around."

"Yes, even. One inch long all the way around."

Helen decided not to have her hair cut. Sadly, we left Portland, with more than one grudge. We turned off the main highway and took a side road toward Stayton, center of the bean area. We saw squalid migrant camps along the roadside—human beings bunched together in groups of eight and ten. These were the living quarters of the families who picked the crops so that the Associated Farmers could make a sizable profit. Men lose their morale when they live amid filth, cold and hunger. They don't think about unions then.

In the midst of the orchards and camps, a long gray building appeared. The clatter of machines and clank of tin cans jarred the stillness of the night. This was the Stayton Co-operative Cannery. It was almost midnight; we wondered at the activity and the lights in the plant.

Once inside the cannery, we were amazed. Standing at a conveyor belt, young girls and boys worked quickly. Their hands moved rapidly, stuffing stringbeans into shining cans. Brawny arms heaved sack after sack of beans into the cutters. This cannery turned out more than 200,000 cans a week. Energy, given to the world by hungry people. Picked by hungry migrants, heaved into the cutters by sons of farmers who wanted to work the land, sorted by thin-waisted young girls, washed under steaming water by kids who wished they might go to college.

A foreman led us around the cannery—informing us that the workers were content and happy.

A tall, cherubic-looking youth at a hand crane swung hundreds of cans at a time into the pressure cooker. They were placed in a huge kettle, where steam cooked the beans. Mel and Helen wandered off with the foreman, and the others stayed behind to talk to Lee.

No, he didn't work all year around. He was a radio technician, and worked at this only three months out of the year. He had gone to college, but had to quit and go to work. It wasn't any fun working long hours, but a fellow's family had to eat. Conditions? Did we mean the wages?

"They're not good. But something is better than starving."

The steam in the cannery seemed to be toasting every human being in the place. Lee didn't mind it. He wiped his forehead with his sleeve, and hoisted the cooked string-beans out of the kettle and over to the cooler. We rejoined the others in the stock room, where hundreds of thousands of cans, big ones for the restaurants and little ones for the homes, seemed ready to tumble down on us. A solitary lamp illuminated the whole room brilliantly, light reflecting from the shiny metal surfaces.

"Don't sneeze," Joe warned.

Lee must have seen us go over to the foreman. With a nervous smile, he motioned us to come over. "Listen. Don't pay any attention to what I said. The wages here are pretty good, and it's not bad working here."

He watched as we departed.

In Stayton, we learned that the Associated Farmers had driven every union organizer out of town. The cannery had been unionized once, but the owners succeeded in breaking the union and firing all workers who had joined. They didn't like unions. No wonder Lee was worried.

We pushed on to Eugene that same night. At one o'clock in the morning, we found a tourist camp and woke the owner.

"Gee! You guys from Noo Yawk?" In unmistakable accents that spelled home, the voice came from the darkness behind our car. Mel went to investigate and returned almost immediately with the owner of the voice. He was about thirteen years old, dressed shabbily, with a roll of canvas strapped over his torn sweater.

"I'm from Noo Yawk too. Gee! I saw your license."

He turned to Mel.

"I was gonna stretch my canvas out under that tree over there. D'ya think it'll be okay?"

"Sure," Mel said. "Sure, it'll be okay."

"Gee, tanks. You guys are okay. I'll be right behind your cabin dere. If anybody tries to bodder ya, I'll let ya know."

"Okay." We invited him to breakfast with us.

The next morning he woke us by rapping loudly.

"You guys gonna eat breakfast? It's kinda late."

We took the hint and dressed quickly. Helen put coffee on to boil and investigated our food stock. We decided to eat a big breakfast. Cereal, eggs, bread and jam, coffee.

"Nobody else likes cereal," Joe announced to the newcomer. "But I do. How about you?"

"Soitenly. I like anything."

He ate ravenously. His name was Bob Stone. He had left New York two weeks ago and hitch-hiked across the northern part of the country. His parents were dead and he was on his way to live with his uncle in Stockton, California.

"Gee, you guys goin' all da way to 'Frisco? Gee, I wisht I could go wid yez."

We felt awfully uncomfortable. We wished he could go with us too, but we had decided not to take any more hitch-hikers because the springs were not holding up under the present load. We didn't say anything.

"Where do youse live in Noo Yawk? D'ya know where Bank Street is? Dat's where I lived."

"Sure, I know," Joe said. "I live in Brooklyn. We all live in Brooklyn, except George. He lives in the Bronx."

"Da Bronx? I know where dat is. Gee, you guys are poifect. You're real guys. Lotsa people are afraid to take strangers wid 'em. Dey lock da doors of deir cars."

"We're not afraid of anybody from Bank Street," Helen declared. "We like people who come from Greenwich Village."

"Gee, you're okay," Bob said. He was a real diplomat. He helped with the dishes. Then he spread his canvas out in front of our cabin and began to roll his belongings into a neat bundle.

"He doesn't weigh much . . ." Helen began.

We looked at each other. We voted. Mel went outside to tell him he could come with us.

"Gee, dat's swell. You guys are okay. Lotsa people are afraid to take ya wid 'em. Rides is hard to get."

With Bob squeezed into the back seat, and the three boys in the front (we always put the heaviest ones in the front), we turned the car toward San Francisco. Bob took no time at all in adjusting himself to our collective life. We bought a pack of cigarettes, and doled out our quotas of four for each of us.

"Gee, what I would give for a smoke," Bob sighed.

We fell all over each other in offering him a cigarette.

"Gee, you guys are okay," he said. He had five cigarettes,

one from each of us. The rest of us had three apiece. We changed our quota system right there, dividing by six, instead of five.

"Won't you be lonesome?" Lillian asked. "Away from all your friends?"

"A little." He inhaled like a veteran. "I belonged to the Bank Street Club. We had a lotta fun."

He was a Catholic, he told us. Every Sunday he went to mass. He went to church coming across the country too.

"De Faders gave me a good meal," he explained.

For more than 600 miles he stayed with us. He sang, and we taught him some new songs.

*Hello Joe. Whaddya know? . . . Well awright, well awright. . . .*

We taught him—

*Now old Abe Lincoln, a great big giant of a man was he,  
(Yas Suh!)*

*He lived in an old log cabin and he worked for a livin'. . . .*

We rode steadily, stopping only for lunch. Lunch?

"Gee, I'm hungry. You guys are swell taking me all dis way wid yez."

We all had lunch and drove south.

"Stop at the next registered gas station, Mel, will you?" Helen asked.

"All right, but no more stops. We've got to make time."

"Gee," Bob sympathized, with due regard for majority opinion, "you guys would have a lotta fun widout da goils." He smiled engagingly at Helen. "Goils always waste time."

Yreka. The border between Oregon and California. The vigilant guards again searched our car for vegetables, fruits

or plants. Bugs and termites must be kept out of California. More delays, before we finally crossed the border.

Bob was craning his neck. We asked him what he was doing.

"I'm gettin' a good look at California. Gee, it's beautiful. I ain't sorry I left Noo Yawk."

## *Chapter 6* MAGIC LAND

☛ The Chamber of Commerce man gave us a brochure when we were still 300 miles away from Los Angeles and Hollywood.

The invitation to visit Los Angeles County is sincere in every respect, but it must be taken into consideration that those who have only the migration spirit, involving employment here, should be aware of the fact that Los Angeles County is no place for the mere job hunter, and the California law definitely denies relief to persons until they have resided in the State three years without public assistance.

Well.

We looked forward to this "magic land" anyhow. ". . . the red tiled roof . . . the overhanging balcony . . . the stately missions of the Padres . . . the music of the Hacienda life . . . the moving picture capital, HOLLYWOOD . . ."

But a little scared about that "migration spirit" warning, we came into Carmel, north of the magic land.

It was midnight. We wanted some advance hints about Hollywood before the state immigration officers could nab us.

NAMES. . . .

Donald Ogden Stewart, humorist  
Chairman, League of American Writers  
Hollywood scenario writer  
Husband of Ella Winter  
The Getaway  
Friend of Publisher  
maybe a bed

We had picked up a notion somewhere that Carmel was a sort of Greenwich Village of the West Coast, and we supposed everybody stayed up all night. Instead, everybody seemed to have gone to bed, everybody except an old policeman and a clerk at the soda fountain.

"Donald Ogden Stewart goes to sleep very early," said the soda clerk, who wanted to close up shop. "You'd better not wake him up."

We wondered how *he* knew when Mr. Stewart went to sleep. We appealed to the old policeman. He looked suspiciously at Lillian's close-cropped head, souvenir of Portland.

"That's right. You'd better not wake him." The old policeman nodded solemnly.

"Uh . . . how——"

"Don't know where *you're* going to sleep tonight," said the soda clerk. "There's a golf tournament in town, and the hotels are full up."

"They can sleep on the beach," said the old policeman. "It's very nice sleeping on the sand."

"How do you get there?" asked Mel.

"Just go three blocks to your right, drive straight for half a mile, turn left, go down a hill, turn right and there you are."

When we reached the "go down a hill" part, we thought we heard the ocean, but we could not see it in the dark. It was a bad night for us. The girls slept in the car—Helen in the back seat, breathing in the dust accumulated in Kansas and the Great Salt Lake Desert; Lillian curled around the steering wheel, worrying about rum runners and Ernest Hemingway characters. The boys slept on the beach, wondering why the sand was so hard and scanty.

Dawn. We were parked in front of a cellar that was in process of being built. The "beach" was a pile of gravel. We couldn't see any ocean around.

In town we had breakfast and set out to find Donald Ogden Stewart, humorist. The "Getaway" had been Lincoln Steffens's house. Covered with vines and surrounded by shrubbery, it looked like a house people used and liked. Feeling seedy and not too clean, we pulled down the large brass knocker.

When the door was opened, a large cat came out, gave us the once-over and sniffed, then walked out to the garden, ignoring us completely. We stared at the cat and turned to meet Donald Ogden Stewart. He didn't look like a humorist; he looked like the mild-mannered grocer back in Brooklyn. We restrained the impulse to ask him how the soda clerk and policeman knew when he went to sleep, and followed him into a large living room lined with books.

Lincoln Steffens had lived and worked here. A table

piled with magazines, violin cases and music stands, Mexican rugs and Donald Ogden Stewart gave the room an air of comfort and home. We learned that writers came there to write—and wrote. It was a good place. We wished we might stay there and finish our own book. The room seemed to be shut off from the outside world, but we could sense activity in that room, activity of people who were not watching the world go by without taking an unforgettable place in it.

Ella Winter and young Pete Steffens entered from an errand. Both were dressed in corduroy slacks. Both were dark and lithe. Ella Winter and Stewart started to tell us about Hollywood.

The movies—they were owned by the Chase National and other Eastern banks. We would find that Hollywood differed greatly from our preconceived ideas. The progressive movement in Hollywood had helped elect Culbert L. Olson governor. The Screen Writers Guild had grown with the advent of the Wagner Act. Harry Chandler, owner of a million acres of land in California and publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, dominated the county. Moving picture actors were people who worked long and difficult hours for the producers, and they had organized into a union.

We mulled over these facts as we left Carmel, our tiredness forgotten in the eager anticipation of Hollywood, the magic land, where we would find something exciting and different. Los Angeles didn't count; it was Hollywood that drew us.

Down the Salinas Valley. Crops here seemed rich and abundant. Railroad tracks ran through the fields, dividing the lettuce from the wheat. We were still to learn about

the lettuce strike in this Valley three years before, when the migratory workers rose up and defied the big farmers. Seed companies dotted the way—Ferry Morse Seed Co., Eckhart Seed Co. Huge trucks packed with lettuce passed us. The great utilities came into view—the Soledad Pacific Gas and Electric, the Salinas Land Co.

Everything impressed upon us the tremendous power of this land. Irrigation and hard labor had turned out all this richness from a dry desert. But we passed a fifty-mile stretch of land lying unused and wasted—San Simeon, ranch of William Randolph Hearst.

At San Luis Obispo we hit the jagged coast line and followed the Pacific Ocean south. Thousands of migratory birds swarmed above the water's edge, searching a spot of land on which to light. We were to see migratory human beings swarming over the valleys of this beautiful state, also seeking a spot of land where they might stay for a brief period.

At noon, we stopped for a lunch of cheese sandwiches and milk. Joe was nineteen years old that day. Lillian and George disappeared while the others ate. They reappeared to present Joe with a birthday present—a large box of animal crackers. Joe faithfully counted the crackers and divided them into five equal portions. A caged bear near our table stared at him.

The sky darkened as we yearned toward the movie city. "Speed Limit—40 m.p.h.," the signs said, but we paid no heed. A fork in the road halted us; one route would take us directly into Los Angeles, where relatives awaited us, the other would lead us to the city by a roundabout route through Hollywood. We followed the arrow pointing to Hollywood.

Hollywood Boulevard. Neon signs asked us to "Come

and Live among the Stars!" Whiteness splashed with gaudiness. "Build Today for Tomorrow." Red-tiled roofs. "Visit the home of your favorite actor and actress." GLAMOUR. Our expectations were realized.

George poked his head out the window when we stopped for a red light.

"Hey," he called to the occupant of an adjoining car, "are you a movie star?"

"Nah," the young man replied. "I'm from New York!"

He couldn't squelch our enthusiasm. Nothing could—not even Los Angeles proper, just ordinary and spread over many miles of confusing streets.

The girls' Aunt Polly, who lived on the most confusing street of all, greeted us with a batch of mail and five short hugs. Aunt Polly, restrained and sensitive, stood by patiently as we tore open the letters.

One letter was missing. Back in Oregon, we had pounded out our story and sent it East. No letter from our publisher. Had we flopped? How would we get home?

"There's a telegram, too," said Aunt Polly, as we looked at each other silently.

"A telegram?" Lillian repeated.

"Yes, it's been here for more than a week." She looked closely at Lillian. "What happened to your hair?"

"Never mind my hair! Where's the telegram?"

We had not flopped:

YOU HAVE VERY ROUGH DIAMOND BUT MATERIAL HAS  
GOOD BRISK STYLE ON THE WHOLE STOP YOUR FINANCIAL  
STATEMENT TOUCHED MY POCKETBOOK FOR ANOTHER FIFTY  
IF YOU WILL SEND MAILING ADDRESS STOP HEARTY CON-  
GRATULATIONS TO THE ARGONAUTS

LOUIS P. BIRK

We don't quite remember what we did for the next hour. We were in a near coma when Aunt Polly fed us and distributed us into five beds.

We declared a holiday next morning and investigated Santa Monica beach, where we discovered that the Pacific Ocean tasted better than the Atlantic. We attended a rodeo, something we had missed on the Western plains and in New York's Madison Square Garden. Cowboys, Indians and buckin' broncos—the WESTERN West was in Hollywood!

## 2

But glamorous Hollywood lay locked behind doors.

With sixteen-year-old Cousin Maxie in tow, we chased ghosts through Hollywood drives and boulevards. Phone books did not list the key numbers. We had all the wrong addresses in the NAMES book. John Steinbeck had gone back to his ranch 300 miles away. Moving picture studios and their stars were behind mysterious bars and walls.

"It's useless," said Cousin Maxie, his large eyes pleading with us to be sensible. "Nobody gets to see the stars."

"Nobody, eh?" grunted huge Phil Connelly of the Newspaper Guild and secretary of the Los Angeles CIO, when we came to him for help. "And you want to be reporters!" He scowled, made some telephone calls, gave us some names and addresses. "Now go away, I've got the CIO to worry about here."

We went away. We called the right telephone numbers and found the key persons who could take us behind the high walls for a look at the glamour. We saw tall dark Harold Salemsen, correspondent for newspapers in France. The Hollywood *Tribune* sent the business-like and motherly Olive Lynn to interview us, which she did and there-

after adopted us for our stay in movieland. We sought out motion picture organizations and the Will Hays office.

Harold Salemsen had more of the right telephone numbers and gave us his idea of Hollywood between calls.

"It's a phony town in spite of some nice people, and the nice people don't last very long."

Harold's mother taught the French stars to speak English so that they might become Hollywood stars. Danielle Darrieux had learned the language in six weeks. We ought not to think, said Harold, that all moving picture actors were morons. "But you'll see for yourselves."

We started to see with Republic Studios. They warned us that visitors were a nuisance. Don't interrupt scenes. Don't trip over wires. Don't talk. Respectfully, we entered a barnlike building. Huge-eyed cameras and hot lights were trained on a musty set with worn red plush furniture. Jacqueline Wells, heroine in the WESTERN West serials, was suffering in *Kansas Terrors*. The day before she had been suffering in *Texas Terrors*.

First a woman in a mannish suit walked on the set and carefully combed Jacqueline's hair. A short dumpy man turned a chair half an inch around and walked off. Actors and actresses waited anxiously.

"Roll 'em!"

The cameraman, chewing gum with an absent-minded and bored look, pushed the huge camera closer.

Silence. Jacqueline sat at a small table and showed how she was suffering.

"Cut!"

The actors began to learn new lines, the mannish woman again fussed with their hair, the short dumpy man again walked on the set and moved the chair another half-inch. Every minute detail would have to be perfected before

another scene was taken. We could talk now. "Let's go," said Mel.

We wandered over to another large barn—*The Arizona Kid* starring Roy Rogers and Sally March. The director in blue slacks was explaining to Roy how to be a real Westerner. They wouldn't shoot the scene for another half-hour, until all the players learned how to be real Westerners.

In the outer office, a boy in torn trousers licked an ice cream pop. He looked like William Lundigan. Lillian stared. The boy saw Lillian, started, dropped the ice cream pop.

"Well, hello!"

He was Bobby Lundigan, brother of the star and Lillian's former classmate in Syracuse.

"Well, well, well. Remember those days at Nottingham High School? Remember the fat principal with his little megaphone?"

"Uh-huh," said Bobby accusingly. "Remember that Latin test? You got a 95 or something. And I got a 10. I never forgave you for that. . . ."

"Honest, I couldn't help it," Lillian apologized. "I didn't know any better. What are you doing in Hollywood?"

"Looking for a job. The family came out here after Bill, our pride and joy, became a success."

"How's Syracuse?"

"Still smug. Still Republican. But I'm an exception."

Lillian grinned. "So am I."

Lillian and Bobby shook hands on it, and made arrangements to meet later. We headed for the next studio—RKO. Olive Lynn called a secretary and told her we were writers.

"Are they communists or fascists?" the secretary wanted to know.

"They're journalists," said Olive.

Nick Ermolieff, publicity man, greeted us. He was young and spoke with a Russian accent. His father, Olive informed us, was one of the most famous moving picture producers in Paris. Nick didn't like Hollywood.

"The people are so blasé here," he said. "They have no interest in real art, real music. They are narrow, and they live by the caste system."

"What's that?"

"Everybody is in a different caste. Directors, actors, writers—they have their snobbish groups. If a recognized genius makes one mistake, he becomes a social outcast. He no longer is given a conspicuous table in the restaurants or a second-row seat at the fights."

"Don't you like Hollywood?"

"Well," said Nick, "it's a fine place to live. There's the desert on one side of you"—he gestured with his arms—"and the ocean on the other. There's mountains up, and Mexico down."

He led us into a barn marked Number 4. A murderer was planning a murder. But he kept forgetting his lines and apologizing to the other members of the cast, so that he looked like a very meek murderer. Make-up men mopped actors' brows, and the villain's mustache was waxed more firmly as he promised not to forget this time. Lillian Bond adjusted her girdle and waited.

Roll 'em and cut. Repetition of minute scenes. Memorize a line, wait half an hour, and say it. We were beginning to find the glamour a bore. Hours had to be spent on putting every eyelash in place, in getting the exact position to the fraction of an inch for the actors. The barns might have been factories and all the painted actresses as alike as factory commodities. On the sets, the actresses seemed to be all make-up,

perfectly painted lips, hair dyed the best photogenic shade, long false eyelashes.

Nick brought over Lillian Bond, the English star.

"Oh, you are seeing your country," she said. "How interesting. How I would love to go with you! . . ."

"What do *you* think of our country?" asked Helen.

"I like A-mer-i-ca," she said slowly. "How I would like to see your South. It is so glam-o-rous. You are such a colorful country . . . your dark mammies in bandannas singing in the fields as they pick your cotton and everybody so-o-o happy. Oh, I like A-mer-i-ca. . . ."

"Well," said Olive Lynn as we walked on, "most of the foreign actors think America is really like that. They know America only from the way it is portrayed on the screen. You can't blame them."

Nick introduced us to a new star—Linda Hayes, who had landed in the movies *via* the Gateway to Hollywood program, run by Jesse Lasky. She was young and new, but poised and prepared for all questions.

"If you want to act more than you want to eat, try the moving pictures—but not unless." She spoke evenly and quickly.

We had no ambitions.

Another Lasky find, Kathryn Adams, rushed past us with a vague and bewildered expression.

"Hollywood struck," Nick explained.

We didn't want to give up; we tried another studio—Universal. It looked the same as the others. Large buildings, busy people and important-looking directors. We told the publicity man we wanted to meet Deanna Durbin. We had seen her pictures and liked them. We had admired her for her natural charm and wholesomeness.

The publicity man took us to the set of *First Love*, and we met the young girl who had been termed "America's Kid

Sister." At seventeen, Deanna had the sophistication and features of the twenty-five-year-old standard movie queen.

"How do you do," she said quietly and politely and waited for us to ask questions. We suddenly felt embarrassed, as if we were at some sort of freak show, out slumming for a stare at a person who had no right to keep her life from the public's gaze.

She stood in the bright sun dressed all in blue. Tired lines had formed around her eyes. Heavy screen make-up had caked on her face and soaked into her pores. She gave us no false and mechanical publicity smile. She silently waited for us to ask questions.

"You have to grow up fast here," Deanna replied to our question, "because you are treated like an adult and you have to work like an adult."

Deanna spent eight hours on the set. Before that, she had to be dressed, combed, made up. In the evenings, she studied her parts. She was a Universal "success." She had lifted the studio out of the "red" and now the studio was rushing her through life to keep the books in the "black."

We visited other barns. On a set hotter than the others, a camera stand-in stood wearily as lights were focused on the jungle scene. We watched from behind the cameras. A man in overalls sprinkled water on the fake foliage, making "dew." Helen sank into a chair labeled "Joan Bennett." When everything was arranged, we asked the publicity man if we might interview the stand-in.

"What for?" He looked surprised. "She's only a dummy. All she does is stand like this." He opened his mouth and flopped his arms foolishly.

When the cameras, lights and props were finally ready, pretty Joan Bennett and her leading man walked toward the camera from the jungle. Cut and retake. Again they walked

toward the camera. No good. Again, until the director was satisfied. The picture, *Green Hell*, opened in New York several months after we had returned home. The papers gave it one star.

We could not understand this waste of money, time and actors' talents. Back home we never attended pictures like *Green Hell* or *Texas Terrors*. We were becoming impatient. We visited the Walt Disney studio and saw how Mickey Mouse was put together—tediously and meticulously. Walt himself was the voice of Mickey Mouse. Donald Duck's voice was a cowboy on a nearby ranch. A guide showed us rooms where each movement Mickey made was drawn separately. Hundreds of girls were employed to do the "in-betweening," the coloring, and a few specialists were hired to do the animating. Sometimes the girls' eyes gave out, said our guide, and that was a shame.

We were beginning to wonder whether the glamour was worth the tedious work, the callousness, the caste system. Then we saw a good actor at work in the movies.

Paul Muni never allowed outsiders to watch him at work. But we hid behind a screen on the Warner Brothers set and watched the prison scene from *We Are Not Alone*. A stand-in took Muni's place on a narrow cot in the prison cell, under hot lights and the careful direction of the cameraman. A secretary made notes of the actors' positions and dress. Two men adjusted the microphones. Silence.

Muni entered quietly and took his position. He began to speak. Under props and lights, before directors and make-up artists, he was not Paul Muni. He was a condemned doctor, unjustly sentenced to die. Dazed, he tried to explain to the preacher. . . .

"Cut!"

Muni walked off the set.

Shocked, we realized we had been watching intensely. We wanted to see the whole picture. We tiptoed out of the barn. It *was* worth all the heartache and waste, if great actors could make great pictures. But was it necessary? Could Hollywood produce worthwhile movies without the callousness and waste?

We learned how movies were put together. A confusion of sound. Talking backwards, music played backwards, shrieks and squeaks. We visited the film editor, who could make or break a picture, according to Warren Low. A film editor himself and Olive Lynn's ex-husband, Low looked like Jack (he-man) Holt. He was editing Paul Muni's picture. We peeked into the miniature projection and cutting machine.

Low ran the scenes backwards and forwards, making a whole picture. He was preparing two endings for *We Are Not Alone*—a happy ending for the small towns, a sad ending for the big cities.

As we took leave of the Warner lot, Leo Gorcey, Dead End Kid, ran by in his uniform from *On Dress Parade*. He looked like a heavy-set man. We couldn't talk to him. He had not been prepared by a publicity man.

## 3

We had seen the studios and the stars at work. We had a lot of questions to ask about them. So we tossed more nickels into the telephone slots, pulled wires and rang bells. We would see the Hollywood people on their home ground without benefit of publicity men. We would ask those questions.

We used to listen to Fred Allen's radio program. There was a comedian on it with a grisly voice who got a big hand every time he made his entrance. Our friends in high

school would walk around with a bullfrog in their throats imitating the voice with "All-o, Joe." The voice and its owner became a national institution, and then the movies discovered him.

We found Lionel Stander high up in Hollywood Hills in a house jutting out of the side of a mountain. He was lying on a couch, eating an apple and reading a newspaper.

"All-o," he said, removed his glasses and put on his shoes reluctantly.

"Don't make a point of it, but I used to write stories myself, sensational sex stories for the *New York Journal*," he told us. "Every day, a new sex angle. That was me."

He smiled. All we saw when he smiled were two beady slits instead of eyes, set deep in a shining surface. He looked larger, broader and saner than he did on the screen.

We came at half past eleven that night, and by two-thirty we had helped smoke all his cigarettes and had eaten all his candy. Mrs. Stander came bounding in from the hills with a giant Russian wolfhound. Slim and blonde, one of the few really beautiful women we had seen in Hollywood, she sat on the floor near the fireplace stroking the dog and listening to Lionel.

We began to ask our questions.

"No, there's not much romance to movie making. They turn out pictures like factory work. In Europe, they're more honest about it. Here we call them studios. There they call them cinema factories."

"How about the wild night life of the stars?"

"It's the bunk," Lionel waved his hand and made a Stander-ish wry face. "The actors get so tired working all day and sometimes at night, all they can do is go to sleep. Their juice gets dried up under those hot lights. Don't believe those silly stories in the fan magazines."

We asked him why the screen companies made pictures like *Green Hell*, why they wasted so much money, why they treated stand-ins and obscure artists so callously, why there was a caste system in Hollywood. He gave us reasons for his answers and explained them carefully. We might have been listening to a lecture by one of the more intelligent college professors.

The moving pictures were changing, slowly, but they were changing, he told us. People demanded better films; producers were not in the business for love; they wanted to make money. And if the public refused to go to see the cheap stories, the producers had to give them more intelligent stories. So moving pictures were changing.

And workers in Hollywood had organized in order to protect their rights. Movies were like any other industry. If the stars and extras and stand-ins did not organize to protect themselves, they would suffer from long hours and bad treatment, like any other workers.

Motion picture actors were like other people; they took sides on controversial questions and fought for those things they believed right. The Motion Picture Democratic Committee had been instrumental in electing Governor Olson over Merriam, the Republican. The Motion Picture Artists Committee had raised funds to help China and the Spanish Loyalists.

Helen and Lillian had bumped into Mischa Auer at the Universal studio. He proudly showed them his long slinky car with all its peculiar gadgets and asked the two girls to go for a ride, to try it out, such a wonderful car, assembled mostly by himself.

"Ah, youth! Youth!" he said, rolling his large soulful eyes and looking down at the girls. "Such enterprise!" He

wore a cream-colored slack suit, white gloves and white sandals.

Lillian and Helen told him more about our trip. He snapped his fingers. "You must come to my house and sweem in my sweeming pool."

"May we bring our friends?" Helen asked.

"Friends? You mean there are more of you doing this waa-anderful thing?"

"Three more."

"Ah, youth. Such enterprise." He shook his head affirmatively. "Hokay. Bring them all along."

So we swam in Mischa Auer's pool, behind his home in Beverly Hills. We met his plump, good-natured wife, and she poured cold glasses of beer for us. We sat around the pool in our suits, talking and listening to the radio.

A large color picture of former Tsar Nicholas had greeted us when we entered his library, and Mischa talked with a heavy Russian accent.

"Sure I'm a Russian," he told us. "But I beat it when the Revolution broke out."

His grandfather, Leopold Auer, the great violin teacher, had taught him how to play. But he had preferred a career of acting.

"You need plenty of pull to get into the motion pictures. You need someone on the inside to give you a break. That's how I got in."

Mischa's little boy started to throw his father's tennis rackets into the water. Mischa ran after him, threatening a spanking.

"He's always breaking things," Mischa complained when he had returned to us. He sighed. "Ah, sometimes I feel like going back to the good old days in the Catskills. Stock acting in the Borscht circuit—those were the days. I was

nineteen then, got good money and worked as a social director. You know, a little acting and a lot of necking."

The telephone beside the pool rang. Mischa answered in a stream of Russian. "*Da. Da.* (Yes. Yes.) *Stoi.* (Hold it.) *Da. Da.* Okey-dokey."

He hung up. "That was a Russian friend of mine. I'm trying to help him get a job. Yes, you need pull to get into the movies. And you can't get yourself mixed up in political questions. I'm an actor. An actor is a bad politician, and a politician is a bad actor."

Staccato reports fired out of the radio about an impending war in Europe as the sun went down, and we went inside to dress.

## 4

We climbed a curved road high into Hollywood Hills. Gale Sondergaard and Herbert Biberman were hidden up there. A tarantula big as a tennis ball crawled slowly uphill next to our car. Slightly ashen at the sight of a tarantula amid the modern luxurious homes, we rang the Bibermans' doorbell. A maid who looked like Clara Bow admitted us. Herbert, swarthy and charming, mixed cocktails as Gale extended a beautiful hand and seated us on fleecy couches. Paintings of Gale and of a large fierce tiger hung on the walls. From the garden beyond the French doors we could see all Los Angeles.

Herbert Biberman, former director of the Theatre Guild in New York, was one of the best known and least publicized men in Hollywood. He was directing the Motion Picture Guild's production of *School for Barbarians* by Erika Mann. Together with his actress wife, he explained in more detail what Lionel Stander had told us about the change in motion pictures.

"Hollywood used to be compared with the glamour girl of the twenties—beautiful but dumb. Productions were stupendous. . . ."

Yes, but they didn't mean anything to Eddie Wagner in Lancaster, to the steel workers in Gary, to the Missouri farmer or to Mike, the longshoreman. When would the studios pay some heed to what these people wanted?

"Hollywood," Biberman replied directly and quickly, "is not any different from any other community, except that people here project themselves upon the rest of the world. They have a tremendous responsibility to the millions of people in the country. The pictures and the actors set the styles, change customs of living, propagate ideas and affect political trends."

"But do the pictures initiate these ideas, or do they reflect the ideas of the people?" Helen asked.

"They *have* to reflect them," said Gale Sondergaard, and smiled, unlike the smile of Sondergaard on the screen. "The picture industry is a business. They can't and don't make pictures if the pictures don't make money. And the pictures won't make money unless people go to them. People want to see pictures that develop, express and extend their own ideas."

"And how are the producers supposed to know what ideas the public wants?" George crossed his legs and looked steadily at Biberman and his wife.

"What the people want is reflected always by what they do. The growth of unions, for instance, is having a tremendous effect on the movies. It's good business, today at least, to make progressive pictures. That's why we've had pictures like *Juarez*."

That afternoon we began to understand the forces at work behind the scenes in Hollywood. We learned why the high-

est-paid workers in the world belonged to unions and walked on picket lines. There was no house behind the porch on the studio lot, no prison beyond the cell, but there was a powerful voice behind all the glamour. There were thinking people under the make-up.

We went to dinner in style at the Westwood Restaurant with George's famous Cousin Nicky, a studio executive. The waiter told George he was sitting in the same chair Shirley Temple used every Thursday night when the Temple cook was off. George looked pleased. We stared unimpressed at the footprints of Joan Crawford and Wallace Beery and Jack Benny in the cement outside the lavish Grauman's Chinese Theatre. They looked like ordinary footprints to us.

Olive Lynn took us to Ray Bourbon's night club. "You'll see the decadent side of Hollywood," she warned. "Some of the moving picture people and tired businessmen go there for higher excitement. They want anything that offers diversion. That's why fortune tellers, swamis and Aimees prosper here."

"Aimees?"

She laughed. "Aimee Semple McPherson, the evangelist."

A shriveled, middle-aged woman led us to a table at the side of the smoky room. A low ceiling, risqué paintings and odd red ornaments provided atmosphere. Red was the predominant color; even the pianist's nose was the color of red pepper.

"Everybody here knows what everybody else is thinking. If they don't, they suspect it." Ray Bourbon, fat and oily, with a black mustache, opened the program in a high-pitched voice. Then he removed his false teeth.

"See? Now I can kiss like Gable!" He laughed shrilly.

Well-dressed and well-fed men and women sat around us.

A gray-haired, attractive woman, very drunk, burst into song, wildly and in a deep voice.

Said Ray Bourbon, "Did you cut your finger nails, or have you been looking at those concrete statues in the park again?"

The lights were dimmed, and a strip teaser came on. "Don't I look like an advertisement for Super-Suds?" she asked when she had completed her act. Ray Bourbon applauded uninterestedly. He sang, mimicked and gratuitously patted the pianist's head. Young men in the audience waved at him.

In the washroom, a Negro girl handed Helen a towel. She pointed to a small sign above the sink: "Tips Are My Only Salary."

"Wrong?" she answered Helen's question. "Sure it's wrong. I pay for the laundry and the towels. Get no money at all from the management. But I can't find any other job. I'm putting two brothers through school; one wants to be a lawyer. Maybe he'll do better than me."

Hundreds of people came to Hollywood to find success. Pretty girls saved their money in Waynesboro, Cleveland, Kansas City and Grants Pass. They came to Hollywood and worked as waitresses in the drive-in hamburger stands—for tips. The young Negro girl at Ray Bourbon's didn't want to be in the movies. But she worked—for tips.

Mara Alexander, an extra, worked in pictures, for wages, not tips, but jobs were scarce. She didn't want to be a star.

"Why should I?" she demanded. "The more money you make, the more you are compelled to spend. It's all a big show. You only get to the top through favors. And then, it's not acting you do—it's hack work."

Behind the scenes, we took a look at the unions and organizations of moviedom.

"Hollywood is an industry," said tall, lean Jeff Kibre, leader of the technical workers of the screen and fighter for unity among the various unions, "an industry where motion picture plants employ from twenty to thirty different crafts."

Eight years before, Jeff Kibre had written a daily column entitled "Jabs" for the newspaper at the University of California at Los Angeles. Now he was directing his jabs against "the racketeers within the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees [spelled IATSE, pronounced "yaht-see"] and against the producers who try to knife it."

The rank and file union members were fighting for a clean union, and Jeff Kibre was one of the leaders in that fight against racketeers. Kibre opposed Willie Bioff, accused of accepting \$100,000 as a bribe from Joseph Schenck, producer, in June 1937. Make-up artists, extras, prop men, carpenters, cameramen and stars—all wanted a clean union that would protect their rights. They didn't want racketeers who would work hand in hand with the producers against those rights. They didn't want intimidation of screen workers who spoke up for those rights. In the fall of 1937, Francis Black, a Warner Brothers writer, had protested against paying a 2 per cent assessment to the racketeers and had insisted upon a formal protest. Next day he was fired at the request of IATSE officials. Kibre told us stories of physical violence and gunmen threatening others who protested.

We met other leaders behind the scenes. Marcelene Peterson, tall and blonde, was the executive secretary of the Motion Picture Artists Committee. She had worked for one of the studios as a writer. The Committee had enlisted the support of the stars for Loyalist Spain, and now continued to raise money for refugees from Franco in French concentration camps. Her spare time, when there was any of it,

was devoted to writing a book called *From Gish to Garbo*, the story of monopolies in the moving picture industry.

Blonde Betty Anderson, whom Walter Wanger had called "the most beautiful Hollywood extra," had been saved from the movies because her teeth were uneven. She became the executive secretary of the Motion Picture Democratic Committee when she was twenty-two years old. Actor Maurice Murphy, twenty-five years old, who had just completed *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, had been one of the original sponsors of the Committee. Helen went to interview him, and he took her to a quiet spot for cocktails, where he explained that the Committee worked to popularize better housing efforts through radio, the screen and the stage. Maurice had worked in filling stations and had dug ditches. Now he was busy "uniting all organized labor, the Catholic Church and even the Chamber of Commerce behind New Deal measures."

Ray Spencer managed the Hollywood Theatre Alliance, an organization to establish "a permanent, non-profit and professional theater." He told us the Alliance intended to produce stage shows "to further the principles of democracy and to illuminate the times in which we live."

Slim and sophisticated Sonia Dall talked with us about her League for Democratic Action. Artists, she said, didn't want to separate the make-believe life from the real. Melvyn Douglas, Miriam Hopkins, Harpo Marx, Gale Sondergaard, Sylvia Sidney, Walter Wanger, Fredric March, Herbert Biberman, Gloria Stuart and many, many others . . . "they know what war and fascism do to art."

The Screen Actors Guild, the Associated Film Audiences, the League of Women Shoppers . . . we found the real and the meaningful behind the paint and powder.

## 5

"Hollywood is only a part of Los Angeles," complained Aunt Polly. "Every night you come home and talk about Hollywood. Why don't you find out something about Los Angeles?"

We didn't care about Los Angeles. But when we did find out something about the big city, we were surprised.

Los Angeles was old.

Olvera Street, the first main thoroughfare, had become a "tourist" street. The visitors came to look at the Mexicans selling hot chili and pig banks on the narrow street. They stared at the Avila Adobe, oldest building in the city, which Don Francisco Avila had built in 1818. Mexicans made their living here.

Main Street reminded us of New York's Bowery. You could see three and sometimes four Wild West movies here for only a nickel. Stores advertised suits of clothes, slightly used, for only two dollars. Unshaven men in torn clothing wandered up and down, and tourists came to look.

Things were cheap, but Los Angeles didn't seem like a bargain to us. We saw many signs all over the city.

Freedom for Workers  
Prosperity for Business

DEMAND  
Peace in Industry  
Southern Californians, Inc.

We visited the Southern Californians. We learned they supported the Associated Farmers, were opposed to the Wagner Labor Relations Act, put pressure on the state legislature to pass the anti-picketing measure—an organiza-

tion of big business. Los Angeles was a big-business city.

Mel insisted on taking a vacation here. He had lost ten pounds already and he needed a rest. He was the only one who could drive. So we spent hours traveling about the city on crowded and badly ventilated trolley cars.

We waited for a car one day. A thin woman approached and asked the time.

"Do you live here?" she asked when we had given her the information.

"No."

"I thought not. You look happy," she said.

We laughed uncomfortably. "Don't you like it here?"

"Like it? I hate it. I came out here eleven years ago for a visit and got sick. I've been sick ever since. No, don't be nice," she added when we sympathized; "it's too unusual out here. Los Angeles people are selfish and mean."

"Yes, Los Angeles is a great city," said Lee Shippey, Los Angeles *Times* columnist. "We have great department stores and factories. *Our* Wall Street is famous for its flowers instead of its finance."

We saw the flowers, the finance and the factories. The aircraft factories were the biggest industries—airplanes are important for wars.

"I've seen ads in the science magazines," said Mel, "telling about men needed in the airplane industry, and offering jobs after they have completed their schooling."

A long line of men waited outside the aircraft factory in Los Angeles. The guard would not admit us. "Sorry, no visitors."

"There are about 100,000 unemployed men walking the streets today who have worked in the aircraft factories," said Johnny Orr, organizer of the aircraft division of the United Automobile Workers of America.

We told him about the long line of men outside the factory.

"Sure," he said. "War orders are picking up."

He explained how the aircraft companies operated. "They want to keep a large surplus of labor on hand in order to keep wages low. They don't have to pay the minimum wage to apprentices. So they advertise in magazines, offering jobs to thousands of young kids. They get these boys from all over the country and train them in their schools."

We talked to Roy, a young aircraft worker, outside the plant during lunch hour. Roy had gone through high school in Asheville, North Carolina.

"So I came out here," said Roy, "and paid a hundred dollars for the course. All I learned I could teach you in three days. They got me a job in the plants. I get eighteen dollars a week. There's no way I can get anything better or work myself up. All I can do is quit."

Hollywood, only a part of Los Angeles. Yet in both Hollywood and Los Angeles, we began to see the same picture of people as in the Northwest, the Midwest, the industrial East. People wanted jobs. They needed security. They attempted to build that security through unions and societies where they might work together for their needs.

People had to live together; that was society. People were the same physically, and they had the same needs. Whether they worked to entertain and amuse and teach, or whether they worked to feed and clothe, they still faced the same needs.

We returned to Hollywood. The ever patient and hospitable Olive Lynn took us to a gathering at playwright Albert Bein's cozy little house in Hollywood Hills. Bein called Hollywood "a melting pot of hick kids trying to be cosmopolitan." Mary Bein, dark and witty, brought out cold

beer and California fruit. We sat on the floor of the small living room, listening to Albert tell stories about his life. He had run away from home when he was thirteen, had traveled on freights around the country, had lost a leg under a railroad train, had done time in a reformatory. We had seen some of these stories in his plays on Broadway, in *Lil' Ol' Boy* and *Let Freedom Ring*, and in *Boy Slaves* on the screen.

We listened, and gradually, as Albert talked quietly, others began to tell about their own lives.

Marshall Ho'o, a Chinese boy in green slacks and a polo shirt, was only twenty-two, but his responsibilities as head of the Federation of Chinese Youth Clubs had cut deep creases in his forehead. There were 40,000 Chinese in California.

"Our parents and grandparents came over in the last century to work on the Union Pacific Railroad and in the fields. But we, their children, grew up with Americans. We're as much a part of America as anyone else.

"I am more Chinese than my parents, however. Sometimes the young Chinese fight to drive off the influence of their ancient land, but I like to build it up and direct it.

"I am able to integrate my activities and my personal life, because I think I have a better understanding of both Chinese and American culture. I follow two simple rules: one, I take each day as I see it, guided by my own convictions; and, two, I strive to better myself and the lot of my people. I know I can't do one without the other, so I must do both at the same time."

Marshall worked in a butcher shop in Santa Monica with fifteen other boys. Conditions were unsanitary, and about ten of the boys were afflicted with some disease. It was a union shop, but the Chinese were not in the union.

"The A. F. of L. makes us pay dues, but they refuse to accept Orientals in their unions. We get no privileges or protection, like the other workers, but we have to pay dues or lose our jobs.

"It is only when the Americans are willing to accept the Chinese that the Chinese will solve their problems. There has been a lot of sympathy for us since the start of the war in China. But we still suffer from discrimination. We live in the poorest neighborhoods, can't afford to go to college and can't join unions. How can we be expected to become good citizens?"

Lois Crozier, very blonde, told us something about citizenship. We had learned about the California Youth Legislature in San Francisco. But Lois, its state chairman, had more to tell us.

"We've got to help all American young people find their place as citizens in the community. Our democracy is being challenged, and if we don't do something about it, who will?"

Lois represented the Baptist Young People's Union in the Congress. She worked as a secretary and taught Sunday School.

"Christianity must be tied up with economics and sociology if it is to be a vital and living thing. That realization has been a growing thing with me."

The California Youth Legislature meant much to Lois.

"Racial tolerance—that's one of the most important things it stands for. At first I was scared because I found young Communists working with me. Then I learned they were working for the same things I wanted. Some of the older folks in the Baptist Union don't like the idea of my working in the Legislature, but they can't stop me. I'll just never, never give it up. It's my life and I know it.

"Being a Christian, I believe that Jesus was a humanitarian above all else. He brought a message of love and tolerance and brotherhood. The Youth Legislature is doing something about those principles and building better citizens by it."

## 6

Will Geer pulled on a striped basque shirt as we sauntered up the walk to his small cottage. Dressed in bathing trunks, he greeted us with a large jug of wine.

George asked for a glass.

"No," drawled Geer, "you drink it like this." On one thumb he hoisted the jug onto his shoulder, turned his head and drank. Tall, sun-burned and slow-moving, he handed the jug to George.

"We'd better have five glasses," said Helen.

We had seen Will Geer in Broadway plays, and when Olive told us he was working on a government film in one of the studios, we invited ourselves over. He told us the picture was a dramatization of Paul De Kruif's book *The Fight for Life*, about the hazards in the birth of a baby. Geer's wife, Herta, was expecting a child, so the picture had assumed an educational role for Will. As we sat around his porch talking, Dr. "Benny" drove up in a small coupé.

"He's the doctor in the film," Geer told us. "He's just a young guy, but he's one of the greatest obstetricians in the country. He's taking care of Herta."

When Dr. Benny came out of the house, Will conferred with him.

"Have to hop over to the drugstore for a few minutes. Don't go away," said Geer.

"We'll just go down the street for a bite of supper," Helen declared.

"Fine," Geer replied and hurried to Dr. Benny's car. "Be sure to come back. Every Friday night we have a community sing at my house. You'll like it."

When we returned for the sing, Geer welcomed us with a broad grin.

"You kids were in on the birth of the youth movement and didn't know it. Herta gave birth to a baby girl while you were gone. We're agoin' to call her Katherine."

We sang and toasted Herta. We toasted Katherine and Dr. Benny. We toasted Will.

"Woody"—self-acclaimed dustiest of the Dust Bowlers, played his "geetar" and sang ballads. Short and thin, with a circular sandy beard, Woody had come to California with thousands of other migratory workers from Oklahoma. He could play the "geetar" and sing. First he had played for the other migrants. Then he began to sing his ballads over a local radio station. He combined his songs with home-spun philosophy on politics and economics and wrote a daily column called "Woody Sez" for the *People's World*, a West-Coast paper.

Then Will Geer sang some ballads. Small groups—they're at every party—formed to discuss the news of the day. Soviet Russia's non-aggression and trade pacts with Germany was the news of that day.

"I can't believe it," moaned a blonde woman, rather plump, with painted toenails protruding from her sandals. "How could Soviet Russia go off and do such a thing?"

Woody approached her.

"Ma'am," sez Woody, "don't you be cryin' about Soviet Russia. She kin purty well take care of herself."

"But how could she *do* such a thing?"

"Ma'am," sez Woody, "don't you take me fer one of them

poh-lee-tical experts that talk so smart on the radio. But Russia is pertektin' herself."

"But how could Russia *do* such a thing?" the blonde woman persisted.

"Ma'am," said Woody as he prepared to sing another ballad, "why don't you go over there and ask her yer own self?"

In another corner of the room, Dr. Benny told Helen something *important*. She immediately rounded up the other Argonauts and led them out to a quiet spot on the porch.

"Listen," she said, "Dr. Benny is going up to see John Steinbeck tomorrow. He says we can go with him."

We toasted ourselves.

"How's he going?" George asked.

"Airplane."

George yanked his hair. "Airplane?" he shouted. "What do you want to do, buy one on the installment plan? We can't go!"

"We've *got* to go," said Lillian.

"We haven't got the money," said George.

Democratic discussion followed, for two hours. We decided to send two Argonauts by car who would meet Benny at the airport when he disembarked. We voted. On the third ballot, the tabulation showed:

Mel four votes.

Lillian four votes.

7

We wanted to see John Steinbeck. We didn't want his autograph, and we didn't care what kind of breakfast food he ate. But we wanted to talk with him, more than we wanted to see ourselves in print.

We saw him, and he was almost as good as his work.

Steinbeck provided conversation for the dinner table among the Hollywood dilettantes. The man who had written a best-seller would not frequent the Brown Derby and act his part! We heard that he hated humanity and suffered from eight different psychological complexes. Middle-aged women, with no encouragement at all, gave us confidential explanations of "Steinbeck's sexiness." The gossip made us feel sick.

At five in the morning, Mel and Lillian sped north. We had stayed up all night talking about Steinbeck. Early in the afternoon, we greeted Dr. Benny triumphantly at the Monterey airport.

"So you made it," he said as he stepped out of the silvery plane.

We grinned at him, feeling proud of ourselves. We had not slept in more than thirty hours, but we had stamina when it came to Steinbeck. We had been chasing him all over California for a month and now——

"Wait here," said Benny, "I'll call him and tell him you're coming."

Benny called and returned to us. Steinbeck had gone out; the person at the other end of the wire did not know where.

"I'm sorry," said Benny. "Some other time. I'm going to San Francisco with some friends. Come along and see the Fair."

"What other time? No, thanks, we've seen the Fair."

"Well, I'm sorry. . . ."

"That's all right," Lillian mumbled. "If Steinbeck is around here, we'll find him. We've *got* to."

Mel and Lillian waved sadly as Benny left for the Fair.

"Do you want to go back to Hollywood?" Mel asked.

Lillian looked at him. "No."

"No," Mel repeated. "What'll we do?"

"Find Steinbeck."

We found him. We combed Monterey and found him in a fisherman's house.

First we found Robert Leslie Bruckman at the Hopkins Marine Laboratory. He was a nice man and very informative. He explained to us the hydrobiological survey of Monterey Bay, the spectroscopic study of algal pigments and the method of preventing the depletion of the \$1,000,000 sardine industry. He talked enthusiastically for several hours about polyclads, chitons, gastropods and coelenterates, about algae and kelps, about Pelagia, Leodice and Glycera.

Mel and Lillian were very patient.

Finally, nice Mr. Bruckman became a little discouraged and asked his two expressionless visitors to his house for some cocoa. He could explain some more things at his house.

"Do you want to go?" asked Mel.

Lillian looked at him. "No."

"No," Mel repeated. "What'll we do?"

"Find Steinbeck." Lillian turned to nice Mr. Bruckman. "Can you give us some names of fishermen around here? People who have lived on the waterfront for a long time?"

"There's one near here. He's a combination fisherman and scientist. He's done some magnificent research among the flora and fauna, very systematically——"

"What's his name?" we asked with exaggerated curiosity, avoiding the hurt look in his eyes.

"Ed Ricketts. The composition of sea water——"

We found Ed Ricketts. He had a Van Dyke beard and a tall bottle of rum. His friend Hilaire (pronounced Hill-aree) Belloc had a Van Dyke beard too and was helping Ricketts with the tall bottle of rum.

Ricketts poured us some. We drank, saw the looks of

approval and were afraid to refuse a second glass. A dim lamp in the center of the room cast shadows over Hill-a-ree, in a torn coat and half sneakers, lying on a narrow unmade bed. Ed Ricketts twittered about us.

"Youth, eh? What are you discovering about youth?"

"They're pretty much the same all over. They want security——"

"Security?" Hill-a-ree laughed shakily. "Bah! All youth wants is a place to throw its dirty socks. Isn't it so, Ed?"

Ordinarily, we would have interrupted quickly to answer for Ed that it was not so. We were youth, and we wanted more than a place to throw our socks. But Hill-a-ree's high-pitched, up-hill down-hill Oxford accent stumped us. We drank our rum silently.

Belloc started to tell us about himself, "for instance."

"Now I'm a fisherman, just a poor ordinary fisherman. When I'm not out fishing, I work at a swimming pool. They pay me a hundred dollars a month just to hang out at this pool. I have to sit around and watch the daughters of the idle rich paint their nails."

"They want more than a place to throw their socks," Lillian suggested, a little belligerently.

That started a long debate about the disgusting daughters of the idle rich who painted their nails. It was run-around-in-circle talk where the participants neither knew nor cared where they were going. With our college sophomoric backgrounds, we were experts at it. But right now we were interested in finding John Steinbeck. As Ricketts arose to refill our glasses, we told him that we were searching for the author.

"He was here fifteen minutes ago," said Ricketts.

"Don't you know where he is now?"

"I think I know where I can find him. I'll run out and

tell him you're here. He'll come if he wants to. Do you want to stay on, Hill-a-ree?"

Hill-a-ree stayed on—with the rum. He talked some more about those disgusting daughters and their toenails.

We waited for a sound outside.

". . . parasites, ugly little parasites . . ."

We heard a car draw up to the house, a door slam and the sound of a heavy man taking the steps two at a time.

John Steinbeck filled the doorway. He was big, with the shoulders of a longshoreman and a round red bulbous nose.

"Hello," he said and threw an old yachtsman's cap into a corner. He seated himself heavily in a chair near the bottle of rum and refilled all our glasses.

"Never thought you kids would make me come to you," he said.

He looked quickly at us with large, round, baby-blue eyes. He fingered his glass with a restless hand. Maybe he was like Jack London or some of the others we never knew. Anyway he was Steinbeck, a guy in gum-soled shoes, tweed sport coat and orange striped basque shirt. He might have been a blustering stock broker at a Princeton football game.

"What do you want to see me for?" he asked. "I don't talk, you've probably heard."

"We've heard. But you read?"

"Sure, sure I read." He coughed up a deep laugh.

"We want you to read this." Lillian gave him the carefully carboned copies of the first draft we had sent to our publisher. He read.

Hill-a-ree began to talk about the dreaded rich daughters. With the corners of our eyes glued on Steinbeck, we sympathized with Hill-a-ree about those toenails. When Steinbeck chuckled, we grinned at Belloc. When something in that draft drew forth a grunt of "good, good" from the author,

we acted as if nothing worse existed in the world than Hill-a-ree's swimming pool.

"Sounds good," said Steinbeck after he had finished reading. Then he "talked" for a couple of hours. A great writer, he was helping two novices just by talking.

Famous writers, what were they? We knew some who were phonies. We didn't like their pretensions, their crawling after the big names, their false lectures to ladies' clubs, their empty talk at cocktail parties. They were shallow and mean. We neither liked them nor wanted to follow in their footsteps.

But we needed help. We wanted to model our lives after the really sincere and creative men. How should we choose our heroes?

We had read Steinbeck's books, including *The Grapes of Wrath* by this time. He brought life simply and honestly to his pages. That was our definition of a writer—that's what we wanted to do. But that was not enough. We wanted to know more—did a great writer keep himself apart from the world he talked about on paper or did he move with that world, his individual life integrated with the people and ideas in his books?

We had seen writers in a trade union, the Newspaper Guild, who moved with the times. But it meant more to us to learn about the writer who had something to say about those times—about the wrongness of degrading human life. Did such a writer confine his sympathy and understanding for people between the covers of a book, or did he extend his interest and his work into actual lives?

I am treasonable enough not to believe in the liberty of a man or a group to exploit, torment, or slaughter other men or groups. I believe in the despotism of

human life and happiness against the liberty of money and possessions.

Steinbeck had written that in a pamphlet called *Writers Take Sides*, published by the League of American Writers, in which he and others had declared themselves to be in favor of the Spanish Loyalists. We had this in mind when we talked with him.

We had in mind also a letter Steinbeck wrote in 1936 to the editor of the student magazine at the University of California at Berkeley:

I wish I could write you the article you suggest, more for my own good than for yours. But man! I don't know enough. There are fine retirements into one terminology or another. I haven't been able so to protect myself. The very frightened use the academy, research into one kind of microscopic detail or another, or bury themselves in some old time and its equipment, feeling safe because that time is over. Others are like the man who approved of revolutions that happened at least a hundred years ago. Others a little closer to the surface create and dive into systems as complete and beautiful and effective as that of St. Thomas. . . . I haven't anything to tell young writers. The ones capable of using their eyes and ears, capable of feeling the beat of time, are frantic with material, while those who use the escapes into technique and definitions, into all the precious tricks that have separated art from life, will not hear anyway.

We had all this in mind when we told him we would write in this book that we had found one want of the people in America—the want of security in life.

"I'm willing to bet," said Hill-a-ree, "that the more security a man possesses, the weaker he becomes."

Lillian replied sharply, "It's easy to bet that way when you don't have any stakes on the bet."

We looked to Steinbeck for an answer.

"Men are growing weaker," he said. "They don't drink and fight and swear the way they used to. The security of their penthouses and night clubs has made them weak." He clipped his sentences short.

"But we don't mean that security," said Mel. "We mean the desire to eat and live. A hungry man who has a good meal gets a taste of security. Won't he become stronger, and fight for more security? Won't he remember how it was to be hungry?"

Steinbeck drained his glass of the rum. He laughed and gazed steadily at us. "Have you ever been hungry?" he asked.

"Well, no. Not really hungry for a long time."

"I've been hungry, really hungry," he declared, his large blue eyes fixed on us. "Now I don't remember what it was like. I remember once I wanted some pork chops more than anything else in life. But I don't remember what it was like. Once hunger is satisfied, a man wants more and more, and he forgets how it was in the beginning."

"But you're stronger, not weaker, now," said Mel.

"How about your own Joad family?" Lillian persisted. "When they got some money for food and overalls and a dress, didn't they feel stronger? Wasn't that security?"

Steinbeck nodded. "But remember there's a great difference between not having anything at all and getting something, and having something to start with and getting more. There's a difference." He broke off, took another drink and poured rum into all the empty glasses.

"Men are hungry now. They're getting restless." He turned the glass in his hand, looking at it.

"There's the story Lincoln Steffens told. He went down to Mexico and saw President Cardenas. Cardenas asked Steffens, 'How can I be sure that I, as the leader, will not drift away from the masses of people or betray their interests?' Steffens told him, 'Give them guns. Give the people guns, and you won't have to worry about drifting away. Give them guns, and they'll watch that you don't betray them.'"

We were silent, and he continued. "Life is simple in itself. It's the economic struggle within the framework of life that makes things complex. I've read books, hundreds of them, every kind, to understand it. I couldn't find one simple answer. I had to go to the people themselves for the answer."

Lillian thought she had an answer. "Why must the economic struggle be complex if life itself is simple? People have to eat and sleep and wear clothes. They have to live with other people. Put those two things together, and you get a simple answer. The economic struggle is the struggle for these two things."

Steinbeck shook his head negatively.

"You're simplifying too much," he said. "You're young yet, and you see only the immediate. There's too much to life. You can't simplify."

Another silence, while the glasses were refilled. We didn't refuse the rum, because we wanted to keep up with Steinbeck. We were beginning to feel a little dizzy, and we wondered if it was due to the drink or to the talk.

"I'd like to stop thinking for a few months," the author continued. "I'd like to be in Vermont in the winter, behind one of those large bob-sleds with the snow in my face. I'd

like to be on a freighter on my way to South America. I'd like to get away from thinking so much."

We stared at him. He arose and looked down at us with a laugh in his eyes.

"Don't look so much," he said. "If you want to write, you've got to *feel* more. Don't look, *feel*."

We *felt* pretty groggy at that moment.

"All we've been saying is nonsense, anyhow," he said. "You know that, don't you? When you think back on this night, you'll know we've been talking nonsense. The nonsense doesn't matter. People out there"—he waved in the direction of the San Joaquin Valley—"people out there are starving and working and fighting and organizing unions and struggling to live. They matter. The nonsense doesn't matter."

A few days later, we saw how those people mattered.

## Chapter 7 VINEYARD OF THE GRAPES OF WRATH

☛ The giant cockroach lay on its back, the bristly feelers wiggling helplessly in the air. We sat on the beds and chairs in the bargain tourist cabin and watched its squirming efforts to move from the center of the floor. We placed bets on its chances.

This cockroach, the owner of the cut-rate cabins had informed us, was over 600 years old. There were thousands of them around, and if their ancient breeding grounds of slums, filth and disease were destroyed, there would be hell to pay. Cockroaches in the open sunlight? They'd go crazy, without dirt and smaller insects to feed their bloated bodies. In their rage, they'd devour each other.

We watched the large, beetle-like creature curiously. It was as big as a California nectarine. This particular cockroach must have been the largest and juiciest of all the species *Blatta* in the world. Its wings were torn, and its head rocked frantically from side to side. Lillian wagered George her cigarette quota for the day that this cockroach would

not have to wait for the open sunlight to meet its end.

From the shadow under the sink, we saw a tiny ant approach slowly and carefully. The giant reached out its feelers, and the ant scuttled away. At a safe six-inch distance, the small black dot stood still. More black ants marched out of the cracks under the sink and circled around the big brown bug.

Then they attacked. The advance guard took the head, some went for the breast, others the wings and the rest of the body. They fought slowly. Another hour passed, and all we could see of the battle was a crazily-rocking brown, spotted with black. Soon all movement stopped.

In the morning, the only sign of the struggle was a small brown mess in the center of the floor. The owner of the cabins entered with a broom, swept the floor, and mumbled complaints about all the ants hidden in the cracks under the sink. . . .

California newspapers said it was all a lie. John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, babies dead from starvation, migratory slums, terror and bloodshed, bankers behind the Associated Farmers—all were furious lies. We knew little about the migratory workers. We knew that Steinbeck's book was a best-seller, but only Mel and Lillian had read it. We had seen "America's first concentration camp" in Yakima where migrants had been interned. We had passed a sprawling "jungle camp"—hundreds of skinny kids, babies suckling at their mothers' dry breasts under torn canvas roofs—someplace in Oregon. We remembered the little fellow who had argued over the price of gasoline on the Redwood Trail. But the words *migrants* and *Associated Farmers* and *California's industrialized agriculture* together had no coherent meaning for us.

The Chamber of Commerce tried to help the five strangers from the great East. One brochure told us: "From many parts of the nation have come business executives to build themselves palatial homes in this land of sunshine. . . ." Another informed us that "those who live in the sun-kissed Southland gather flowers in profusion clear around the calendar." Then why the fuss?

We decided to see for ourselves. We donned old clothes, left our baggage in Los Angeles, and headed for the San Joaquin Valley. How did you go about searching for the truth in sunny California anyway? In San Francisco, Joseph Henry Jackson had advised us to look up Carey McWilliams, who had just written a book called *Factories in the Field*. The book critic had told us McWilliams knew the facts behind the migratory question. Like five versions of Diogenes, we entered the large, white State building in downtown Los Angeles and knocked on a door labeled CHIEF, DIVISION OF IMMIGRATION AND HOUSING.

Carey McWilliams was the CHIEF. He had rimmed glasses and a snub nose. He was, according to the *Visalia Times-Delta*, an "irresponsible and unethical writer."

"We're going into the San Joaquin Valley," we said. "We want to find out the truth about the migratory workers."

McWilliams glanced rapidly at each of us. "What do you want to see?"

"Everything."

"Fine. Go to see Harold Pomeroy or Hugh Osborne of the Associated Farmers; the Tagus Ranch, where Hullett C. Merritt will probably show you around in person; another Associated Farmer you ought to see——"

"Wait a minute," we interrupted. "Aren't these people the ones who are fighting you?"

"Sure," he said, and held out a pack of cigarettes. We smoked, and he continued. "They'll be glad to talk to you. They'll give you the point of view of the Associated Farmers."

"Oh."

"Then go to see the Federal Migratory Camps, at Arvin, Visalia and Shafter, and the Mineral King Co-operative Farm, the Hooverilles near Bakersfield. Dan Harris, editor of the *Kern County Labor Journal* in Bakersfield has a lot of dope on the Associated Farmers. . . . Don't worry about things to see."

"But we don't know anything about the setup in California. We thought you might give us a picture of agriculture in the state before we start out."

"The setup is a nice one," he responded directly. "That's true of both the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys. The hirelings of the Associated Farmers not only work hand in hand with county officers and government officials, but in many cases the vigilantes and the county politicians are one and the same. In Marysville, for instance, the workers go on strike, and the county officials pass a series of ordinances designed to break the strike. The sheriff leads and directs the vigilante terror. The federal government agencies can move in only when constitutional rights are denied by the state and county agencies."

"Why are the big farmers opposed to the federal camps?"

"Because they're islands of sovereignty in the midst of territory controlled in every way by the Associated Farmers. The workers have the right of free speech in these camps. They have access to hot water and a bit of recreation. The Associated Farmers feel that if the workers become accustomed to livable conditions, they will be dissatisfied with the mud-holes and slums on the private plantations."

"Why is agriculture in California so different?"

"That's a big question," he answered. "You'll find out when you see the San Joaquin Valley. Six per cent of the farms comprise three-fourths of the acreage. Farming is conducted on a larger scale out here. The processors raise their own crops, eliminating the small farmer's profit. They sell their own crops to their own canneries at a loss, forcing down the market price. Thus, they force the small farmer to sell at a loss, and they make more profits at the cannery. Eventually they hope to get rid of the small farmer altogether. But you'll see it all in action."

Fortified with an autographed copy of *Factories in the Field*, we took leave of Carey McWilliams to "see it all in action."

We had seen its prologue as we hurried across the middle of America, dipping into the Dust Bowl and coming up for air. From Chicago to the Coast we had seen deserted farm shacks and rusty machines. We had seen crops destroyed by dust, thirst and erosion and turned into an aching, sterile desert. We had seen some of the 6,000,000 acres of land in America now in ruins.

We had learned about the American Farmer as we drove West. We remembered Ted Lang, dark and sullen in his dusty little gas station in Kansas. We remembered the stories of tenants being thrown off their land. We had seen the American Farmer on the road, in a jalopy piled with household goods, blond babies and beds. We had seen the migratory cavalcades heading for California, Oregon and Washington.

Why did we think of him as the American Farmer? In California he was a "dirty Okie." To us, he was a farmer who wanted to work the land. He wanted to raise food. He wanted a piece of ground, with water to give it life, and he

would do the rest. That had been our notion of a farmer before we saw one, and we were not far wrong.

There were 200,000 migratory workers in California, 200,000 farmers who had been cheated and betrayed in their battle for land, water and food.

Their land in Oklahoma had been blown into Kansas. Their place as sharecroppers in Arkansas had been taken by one large, cold, rattling tractor. They had come to California from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Kansas to work for the men who owned the land.

These owners too were called farmers—the Associated Farmers. They didn't work the land themselves. They owned canneries and banks and tall buildings in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. They talked to us of overhead costs, communist agitators, and they studied stock market reports. They did not jibe with our notion of a farmer.

Route 99—the migratory pathway from onions to potatoes to grapes to peaches to apples. We were not alone on the road going north. We sped toward Bakersfield, leaving behind the trail of tin lizzies and dilapidated Chevies with their work-hungry occupants. We passed a family of Mexicans, dark and expressionless, surrounded by mattresses, pots and pans and rags. We entered Kern County. Below us, the valley stretched for miles, an unending brown rug. For an hour we drove past the rich wheat fields, marred by nothing except a large sign, "Rancho Gasoline Corp.—Keep Off," and a fat Mobilgas tank.

A few miles before Bakersfield we stopped at a gas station. We climbed out and stretched. It was September 2—a San Joaquin day, with a temperature near 100. Helen, after determining that the restrooms were duly "registered," tried the door. It was locked. The station attendant hurried over.

"Just a minute, Miss, I have to unlock it."

"Only privileged characters allowed?" Helen chided.

The attendant was embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Miss, we get our orders to keep it locked. We've had a lot of trouble with the Okies."

Inside, a small tin box, like an old-fashioned match holder, was tacked to the wall. "This restroom approved by Good Housekeeping Magazine," its face proclaimed. "Have you any suggestions for its improvement?"

Across the road from the gas station stood a small booth shaded by a large, green umbrella.

STOP HERE FOR INFORMATION  
about

Jobs for Farm Workers in Valley  
California State Employment Service

"Let's go over," Joe suggested.

He and Lillian crossed the road.

"I wonder if we could pass for migrants," Lillian said. "Let's ask for jobs. We don't look undernourished. But if they don't notice your Brooklyn accent, your sloppy pants might get you over."

"Okay," Joe returned appraisingly. "You don't look so civilized yourself."

Our efforts to "pass" were not needed. We were not the only ones seeking jobs. The question, "Any work around?" was expected. Three others were before us. While waiting our turn, we struck up a conversation with a middle-aged man in blue dungarees and a wide straw hat.

"Ah'm too late foh the grapes," he said, "and Ah guess Ah'm too early foh cotton. Just out of luck, thasall."

His car bore a Texas license.

"Things are bad out there. Mah wife's family lives in

Texas, and they're aimin' to move away. Don't go to Texas, if you want work. They're payin' fifty cents per hundred foh pickin' cotton. Mah wife's folks are big people, but they can't pick enough to even try livin'."

His turn came, and he began to confer earnestly with the man in the booth. The young man and woman who had preceded the Texan walked to the side of the road and stood there. The man's shirt was torn at the back, and his sleeves were cut to the elbow. He walked with a limp. A car sped by, and both the man and the woman gestured a going-my-way with their thumbs. The car did not stop. Joe and Lillian approached.

"Waiting for a lift?"

"Yah."

"Don't you have a car?"

"Sold it."

"Oh."

Suddenly, Joe and Lillian felt ashamed.

The man saw the two flushed faces.

"We got no car," he said kindly. "We got to bum rides. We got no other way to get to Visalia for the cotton season." Joe and Lillian hurried back to the car.

2

Bakersfield—the seat of the Associated Farmers.

"They can't get rid of me," Daniel Harris boomed, as we sat around his tiny office in the Labor Temple. "Just let 'em try. They're shiverin' in their boots now."

He said he was having "a helluva time livin'," and we believed him. He was the sixty-five-year-old editor of the *Kern County Union Labor Journal*. He wore thick glasses and a silk shirt.

"Associated *Farmers*, my Aunt Emma! Associated robber

barons, that's what they are! My own father was one of them, so you can't tell me. They stole those large land-holdings. And my wife's father did it too, so you can't tell her."

He removed his glasses with one hand, and with a large white handkerchief in the other, he wiped his perspiring face, thick gray hair and the back of his neck.

"Say, how're you kids traveling?"

"In a 1939 sedan, bought on the installment plan," we answered casually.

He guffawed, and we relaxed. He was all right.

"How do you eat? Been eating regularly?"

"Well . . ."

"Who's in charge of the money?"

"I am." George assumed his righteous attitude.

"Oh," Dan Harris said, pretending to be disdainful. "Here, you," he handed the bill to Helen, "you're the best-looking one. You take this and see that they all get a good meal tonight."

"In my day," he went on, beaming at Helen, "girls who showed their ankles were wicked. Now look at you! Pants! Traveling all over the country in pants. Well, anyway, only one thing makes me mad. People who call me 'that venerable editor.' I'm not old. I'm only sixty-five." He lowered his eyelids coyly. "I can live without working, but I like this work. I say there's something wrong with the whole system as long as there is one child who has to go hungry. . . . Yes, we've got real labor unity in Bakersfield, let me tell you we have. The A. F. of L. big-wigs tell us they won't stand for all this unity, unity, unity talk. But we've got a strong Unity Council, composed of the Workers' Alliance, the CIO and A. F. of L. unions and the Railroad Brotherhoods. And we tell the A. F. of L. big-wigs to go to hell. The CIO

organizer in Bakersfield helped to organize the vegetable workers into an A. F. of L. union in Edison, ten miles away. We've got 6,000 union members in Bakersfield. We can tell Bill Green to go to hell. Yes."

He was silent for a few minutes, and then asked:

"Did you ever stop to think how strange it was that there are so many more horses' behinds than there are horses?"

He roared.

"Which reminds me," Dan said, "of a story. A boy was starving and didn't know what to do. Then he found a million dollars. He returned every penny of the money to the rich man who had lost it. The rich man gave him his daughter to marry. The next day they had twins. Which shows that virtue is its own reward."

Our fun was interrupted by loud shouts outside the Labor Temple.

"Extrah! Extrah papuh!"

Mel ran outside to get a copy. He returned, his dark face serious.

FRANCE MOBILIZES TROOPS

GERMANY ADVANCES IN POLAND

The headlines were three inches high.

"War is horrible," the labor editor said. "As a kid, I enlisted in the Spanish-American War. I was a telegraph operator in the World War. It's horrible. They'll try to get us into this one. Well, they won't do it; not if I can help it. We've got to stay out."

As we left Bakersfield Saturday afternoon, the newsboys' shouts of "*Wah!*" echoed after us. We read the newspaper carefully. Mel drove slowly so that we might follow the printed lines. We passed the large Edison Orange Growers' Association building, the Sunkist advertisements, the rich

oil-drilling area, rows of regimented derricks planted in the land, the wealthy di Giorgio fruit farms. Wrinkled mountains in the distance walled in the richness of the sun-burned Valley. The late afternoon sun colored the sky. And the headlines in our paper seemed to reach out and touch everything.

It was beginning to grow dark when we reached the federal migratory camp at Arvin. Here John Steinbeck had lived with the migrants, while working on *The Grapes of Wrath*. A tall, blond young man dressed in khaki shirt and trousers came out of the small cottage near the camp entrance. He was the camp manager, Fred Ross. He showed us about the grounds, through rows of newly built one-room houses, each with a small front "porch." The agricultural families would move into them in a few days, when construction had been completed.

Ross unlocked the door to one of the houses. Concrete floor, metal walls, screened windows over which metal flaps could be pulled—it was as big as a kitchenette in a New York apartment. It wasn't much; we wouldn't have liked to live there. The migratory workers probably didn't like it either. But it meant a roof, a real roof over their heads. We were to discover that a roof is a rare thing in some parts of California.

Past the new structures were the old tent floors, covered with roofs of patched canvas, to be discarded on "moving day." A little boy playing in front of a ragged tent ran after us as we walked by. He reached Ross and grabbed the manager's legs. Then he ran away laughing triumphantly.

Ross pointed out the recreation hall, the laundry room, the nursery and school, the medical clinic, the garage. He outlined the activities of the camp community. The campers' council was the central governing body and was composed

of representatives elected by the workers. The council met every Thursday night to conduct its business. Wednesday was fun and amateur night, Friday was lecture and moving-picture night on health, child welfare, or cooking.

"Each family," Ross continued, "pays a rental of ten cents a day, and helps two hours a week in the upkeep of the camp. Some pay the rental by the week, some by the month, and some send us the money they owe long after leaving the camp."

In the dusk, Ross pointed to a group of small plots each with a little house, about fifty yards away. These were the "garden homes" where agricultural workers had rented small patches of land to work. The homes raised vegetables and supplied them to the Arvin camp or sold them to private companies.

Fred Ross had been camp manager for only a few months, but he believed in these agricultural workers and liked them. After we had settled ourselves on the comfortable couch and floor in his cottage, he talked with us about his work. His dark, pretty wife and a visiting friend from Los Angeles joined us as we listened.

He showed us the camp paper, the *Tow-Sack Tattler*, published by the workers themselves. We read a poem, called "Cotton Fever," written and signed by "A Camper."

*Along the road on either side  
Cotton's green and two miles wide.  
Fields fan out in rows string-straight,  
And a boll flings out his wadded bait  
And grins at me and seems to say:  
"You'll be a-grabbin' at me one day  
At six bits a hundred weight."*

*Then the bolls started rustling, shoutin' in the air  
Just like as if they was callin' off a square:  
"Chase that possum, chase that coon,  
Chase that cotton boll around the moon.  
Crawl down a row and stand up straight  
On a six-bit whirl for a hundred weight.  
Hunker on along and grab 'er all around,  
Payin' the man for the use of his ground.  
Lint's heaped up an' a record yield;  
Gin's chuck full so gin 'er in the field.  
You can live on the land till the day you die—  
Jus' as long as you can leave when the crop's laid by.  
So pick 'er on down to the end in the gloam,  
Then swing up your sack an' promenade home.  
Meet your baby, pat him on the head,  
Feed him white beans an' a piece a corn bread.  
No need to worry, he'll go freight—  
At jus' six-bits a hundred weight."*

*And so I mosey down the hill  
Cotton bolls a-callin' still:  
"At Long Row's End the Boss Man wait,  
Nail you up in a wooden crate.  
At six-bits a hundred livin's hard,  
But dyin's dear in the County Yard—  
At twenty-five bucks a hundred weight!"*

"We want to print things that you want to read," an announcement in the paper said, "and the only way we'll ever find out what those things are is for you to get busy and bring us little stories or ideas. . . . If you can't write 'em, or don't want to write 'em, then just come on down to the office and talk 'em."

That night we realized that there was a great deal of *work* to be done, editing little papers like the *Tow-Sack Tattler*. To catch the spirit and songs and activities of people like these agricultural workers! That was something worthwhile. We wouldn't have traded one *Tow-Sack Tattler* for a year's subscription to the New York *Herald Tribune*!

"Want to go to the camp dance tonight?" Ross asked.

"Will it be all right for outsiders to come?" Joe asked.

"How much is it?" George inquired, always on the job.

"It's twenty-five cents for guests. Outsiders can come, but you have to be invited by a camper. I'm inviting you."

"It's okay with me," said George. "But only on condition that we go without supper tonight."

We voted to go to the dance—without supper.

A tall, brawny worker in a tight-fitting blue suit approached Helen.

"Would you care to have this round?" he asked politely. Helen was twirled off.

The hall was pretty well filled. Against the walls, on benches, sat the older folks holding sleeping babies and the shy younger folks. The band on the rostrum was a three-piece affair—a fiddle, a guitar and a harmonica.

Joe wandered into a corner, where some young boys stood shyly with hands in pockets. Mel was outside, asking the "gate-man" if there was ever any trouble at these dances. Helen was twirling. George looked at Lillian.

"Wanna dance?"

"Me? Don't ask me! You ought to dance with some of the girls sitting around the room. That's the way you'll get to know them."

"I'm . . . I'm afraid." George shook his head, his collegiate past forgotten.

"Would you like to have this square?" a deep voice inquired.

Lillian turned. A tall fellow wearing sideburns stood with his hand outstretched. Lillian took the hand, waved her free arm happily at George.

Breathless and flushed, after twenty minutes of whirl your partner, in and out, grand right-and-left, she was escorted back to George, who sat disconsolate on the sidelines.

"Well, did you see me doing that square?" she asked triumphantly.

"Yeah."

"What's the matter?"

"I did it. I took your advice." George looked reproachful. "I asked her, the pretty one in the green slacks."

"And?"

"Do you know what she said? 'I ain't dancin' tonight, Bud.' That's what she said. Probably thought I was a fresh guy. This never happened to me before. I'm squelched."

And so we met the migratory workers. The dancing couples in the hall might have been any young people in any part of America. We wanted to write. These young people wanted to farm. A wiry youngster wanted a farm of his own back in Oklahoma if "it ever gets to rainin' out there." Meanwhile he was playing his "geetar" in local beer parlors, just to stay alive. A lovely blonde girl in a bright green dress wanted to marry a farmer and help him work the land. A freckled prankster called Sam became serious when he talked about settling down some day on land of his own. He would save some money, he said, and buy a plot. He'd build the house and barn himself, and start with a good staple crop, letsee, now. . . .

They knew what they wanted and hoped for a time when their dreams would come true. We were no different.

## 3

Sunday morning—and we slept late. We all took showers. Helen and Lillian put on the one dress each had brought, and the boys shaved. Feeling clean and rested, we started out to pay a visit to Mrs. Bertha Rankin, a widow whose small farm adjoined the Arvin camp. It was she, Fred Ross had told us, who had sold the government the site of land for the camp, in spite of the protests of the Associated Farmers.

Her name was on the gate, and we drove right up to the farmhouse. We stepped out into the hot morning sun and knocked. No answer. We knocked again, and heard some movement inside. Finally, without opening the door, a woman called, "What d'ya want?"

"We'd like to talk to you."

"Come back in the afternoon. I just woke up."

Our feelings hurt, we went over to the camp manager's cottage to seek solace. Tall and genial Fred Ross greeted us with some news.

"England has declared war."

"War?"

The word, which we had used so often, now sounded strange, as if the official British pronouncement had given it new meaning and a new taste.

"President Roosevelt is speaking over the radio tonight. We've got to listen to him. He's going to talk about the war." Helen read the announcement from the paper.

"Well, whatever else the war means, there's one thing I'm sure of," Mel declared.

"What?"

"The speculators are going to make profits out of it."

"Check!"

"And the large cotton growers," Fred added.

A knock at the door interrupted our conversation. Fred answered it.

"Hello, Mrs. Rankin," he said.

She was in her forties—a strong, heavy woman. She had bright blue eyes like John Steinbeck's. She saw us and laughed, wrinkling her nose like a little child who has discovered a new toy.

"Well, hello! I didn't know who you were before. But I guess you're all right if you're friends of them," she pointed a thumb at the Rosses. "I guess you're on our side." Thereafter, we were to recognize the small farmers and migrants on the one hand, and the Associated Farmers on the other, by the descriptions of "They're on our side" or "They're not on our side."

"I'm sorry I wasn't very friendly when you called before," she explained, "but you see, I have to be careful. Lotsa times the Associated Farmers send young roughnecks over to try to scare me or threaten to burn down my barn. But you're on our side, I see. You'll have to come over to the house and have some cold lemonade."

"Why don't the big farmers like you?"

"Because I sold this land to the government for the camp. But more because I fight 'em at every turn. Some small farmers let themselves be pushed around by the big ones. But I pay a decent cotton pickin' wage, and they try to make me pay lower."

She told us that the large farmers had caused a strike to be called at Arvin a few years ago. They were the same ones now in the Associated Farmers. They had carried guns and thrown tear gas at the strikers. One of them had called her up to tell her that her own cotton pickers were cooking for the strikers on her land.

“‘Kick them off your land,’ he told me, but I said, ‘Like thunder I will.’ They didn’t try to burn down my place then, because the bank has a mortgage on it!” She laughed. “They own the bank too, and they were afraid to burn my place down.”

She paused. “I was at the Board of Supervisors meeting when they banned *The Grapes of Wrath*. Stanley Abel—he’s kinda king over in Taft—was there and all the rest of them. ‘But don’t you think the book is filthy?’ he asks me. ‘No,’ I said, ‘it’s the same as you men-folks talk when you’re alone.’ That made him mad. But I have three copies of the book and circulate them among the small farmers.”

“They came around here,” Ross said, “and took the three copies out of the camp library. The campers borrowed my personal copy to read.”

“That Board of Supervisors. I’m going up there Tuesday for the meeting. I’m goin’ to ask them to lift the ban. Would you want to come?” she turned to us.

We would.

“How would you like to have lunch afterwards in the El Tejon? That’s where all the Associated Farmers eat.”

“Swell!”

“I like to work with the Workers’ Alliance, because we farmers need people with their grit,” she continued. “The large farmers never pay good wages, but they’re always buying new land. All the money we get from the government to pay for the cotton is going to the landowners.

“I went to San Francisco last week and got some booklets from the Simon Lubin Society. I’m going to give them out to the small farmers here. Mr. Housmer asked me if I saw the Fair. ‘No,’ I told him, ‘I haven’t any money to see the Fair. If I have extra money, I’ll give it to you.’ That’s what I told him.

"Oh, and then I asked him if he got my \$15 check. I hold some shares in a water company. Their lawyer once called me up and said, 'Since that god-damn New Deal got in, the country has gone to hell.' Just like that. I hadn't even asked him. This lawyer is with the Associated Farmers. He sent me the \$15 check as a dividend. Won't he be mad when he sees I sent it to the Simon Lubin Society? It'll come back endorsed in big letters—Simon J. Lubin Society!"

She laughed mischievously, as if she had just played a good joke. The radio had been blaring news of the war on and off as she had been speaking. Everybody would stop to listen, then she would continue. Finally, she clasped her hands and sighed.

"Isn't it awful?" she asked. "I don't know what you folks think. My father and mother were born in Germany, and I hate Hitler. But I don't think the United States should go into the war in Europe. We've got enough to do here without going to fight Europe's wars."

Another light knock was heard. It was a little boy, shyly asking if he might borrow the Sunday paper. Mrs. Ross gave it to him. Everybody seemed to be hungry for news of this war.

We left with Mrs. Rankin. She gave us the promised ice-cold lemonade, and George, fussing around with things, picked up a gun carelessly.

"Careful, son," Mrs. Rankin admonished. "It's loaded."

George paled and dropped the gun quickly.

"I keep it with me always. Can't take any chances when you're buckin' the Associated Farmers."

After promising to meet the following Tuesday at the Bakersfield Court House, we took leave of Mrs. Rankin. She was a small farmer still. How long could she hold out?

We wondered what the solution to all this was going

to be. Carey McWilliams had advised us to visit the Mineral King Co-operative Farm. In *Factories in the Field* he had written:

The real solution involves the substitution of collective agriculture for the present monopolistically owned and controlled system. As a first step in the direction of collectivization, agricultural workers must be organized. . . . A partial solution will be achieved when subsistence homesteads have grown up about the migratory camps; such an arrangement should bring about a large measure of permanent stabilization. But the final solution will come only when the present wasteful, vicious, undemocratic and thoroughly antisocial system of agricultural ownership in California is abolished.

We saw Mineral King—the first collective farm of its kind in California. When we first saw it, we thought it might be a mirage. After all, this part of California used to be a desert. We drove past vacant, unused lands, ugly and bare. Mineral King had to be reached by a side road, and it was bumpy and dusty. Then—fifteen red and white homes, community buildings, the manager's house, barns, storerooms. Children on bicycles and up in the trees. Activity everywhere.

Fred Nagel, director and manager, explained the setup. The farm was operated like a corporation. The thirteen families (two more to be added) worked the land together, dividing the profits. The farm was leased from the government at a seven-dollar-per-acre yearly rental.

Mr. Nagel unrolled a large blueprint, showing what the farm would look like "once it really gets started." The plans showed provisions for landscaping, terracing, flower and vegetable gardens, new buildings.

"We're not afraid to go ahead," Mr. Nagel told us. "Last

year the co-operative voted to invest the small profit in cattle. That's the way we intend to grow. And we're not afraid of opposition from the Associated Farmers."

The farm sold some of its products on the market. The Visalia federal migratory camp near by bought raw milk from the co-operative. When additional labor was needed on the farm, the agricultural workers from the camp were hired. The friendliness and co-operation extended to Saturday nights when the farmers and migrants danced squares and rounds with each other at the camp hall.

We visited the new homes, four modern, neat rooms, arranged with scientific ventilation and lighting. Each home was equipped with refrigerator, wash tub, washing machine, table-top gas stove and modern plumbing facilities. In a still-unoccupied house, a new ironing board stood in the corner. Outside were a tool shed and open garage. A eucalyptus tree shaded the front porch.

A tall man in a tan sport jacket approached us.

"Do you mind giving me some information about this project?" he inquired in a clipped, neo-Oxford accent.

"Be glad to," Mr. Nagel replied.

"Quite a lot of land for so few men to run, isn't it?"

"We have machines."

"Do the crops pay?"

"Not much. We have to diversify the crops before they can pay. Next year, we will."

"Well," the tall man granted, "with all its faults, I can see that it helps the relief situation some. Of course, fifteen families can't relieve it much. However, it's an interesting proposition."

The tall man left, and the manager smiled.

"Some days, all I do is answer questions. A lot of skeptics around here, you know."

Skeptics? We were not the ones to take things for granted. But we had been learning a number of things about living conditions of these ex-Midwestern farmers, and we could recognize a good thing when we saw it. One elementary necessity of life was at stake here—*food*. We had read a pamphlet purchased in Bakersfield, *Their Blood Is Strong* by John Steinbeck. The author had listed the following typical diets of the migratory workers:

When the families worked and made money——

Family of eight—Boiled cabbage, baked sweet potatoes, creamed carrots, beans, fried dough, jelly, tea

Family of seven—Beans, baking powder biscuits, jam, coffee

Family of six—Canned salmon, cornbread, raw onions

Family of five—Biscuits, fried potatoes, dandelion greens, pears

When the families did not have any money——

Family of eight—Dandelion greens, boiled potatoes

Family of seven—Beans, fried dough

Family of six—Fried cornmeal

Family of five—Oatmeal mush

These typical diets showed complete absence of milk for the children, whether or not the families were working. The Mineral King kids drank fresh milk. The Mineral King families were able to eat fresh vegetables and meat. Once their kids had chewed strips of leather—to get the “taste” of meat. In the near-by Visalia Camp, children of the migrants were given milk daily by the camp management, which purchased it from Mineral King. This made sense. Mineral King Co-operative Farm made sense.

We headed back over the crooked side road to the Visalia

Camp, determined to compare notes with some of the 1,500 workers housed there. Visalia was the largest of the federal camps, its metal houses the same as those at Arvin. The telltale flivvers lined the roads in front of the uniform rows. The porches were crowded with boxes, brooms and broken chairs.

Jerry, the camp's guard, took us on a tour. He was short, with big round shoulders. He wore a khaki suit.

He led us into a large recreation hall. Men sat at the tables, playing checkers or dominoes. Little boys rolled on the cool floors.

We saw the nursery, a darkened room behind the entertainment hall, where eighty small cots each held a sleeping child. We saw the library, medical clinic, washing machines and laundry room, toilets, showers, garage.

A radio played softly near the laundry. Women, old and young, bent over the tubs. In an adjoining room, both men and women ironed the clothes. The smell of cleanliness was all over.

In the clinic—new desks, two typewriters, a shiny filing cabinet, dressing rooms, large white cabinets, labeled bottles,—all clean and new.

Two government-paid nurses and two visiting doctors came every day to examine, advise and heal. Persons with contagious diseases were immediately isolated and removed to a hospital. That clinic was *something*, Jerry said proudly. We agreed.

"But how about all the others, those who can't live in the federal camps?" we asked Jerry. "What's going to be done for them?"

"I would say put up more camps," the guard replied. "Only 3 per cent of the workers are cared for by government camps. The government just *has* to put up more

camps. They can't let these folks die. They're too good to die."

Too good to die. . . .

We walked back to the manager's office slowly, passing a group of small children in front of one of the metal shacks. A freckle-faced, ten-year-old boy was feeding a tiny blond tot. The baby sat on the porch waving its arms, as the little boy crouched before it patiently holding the large spoon.

These children impressed us as being older than they looked. Sure, all kids were the same. But these were different. Maybe they seemed older because in their own families they were considered an economic asset. The fruit and cotton ranches hired whole families. Children worked in the fields. "Sure they ought to play and go to school, but they got to eat first," one father told us.

More than 100,000 children of school age or younger were estimated to be with the migratory families. The Federal Wages and Hours Act provided that no child under sixteen years of age might work during school hours. Was that law enforced in California?

Future citizens. They didn't know what it meant to sleep in a bed or eat at a table. Their parents could remember these things, but these children had grown up on the road, in jungle camps and in fruit orchards. They had nothing to remember.

Some of the older ones could remember, and the memory had made them bitter. Two boys were sitting under a newly planted tree in a spot of shade. The taller boy, blond and lanky, supported himself on one arm and examined us suspiciously. The younger one, dark and anemic-looking, in tattered overalls and torn canvas shoes, smiled faintly.

"C'mon over and set," he invited. "It's hot."

"My father owned a ranch in Texas," said Evan, the older

boy, as he lay flat on his back and stared up at the California blue sky. "Then he got into debt, lost the ranch. We went to Oklahoma and got into debt again. When we heard about California, we were like all the others—thought money grew on trees. Waa-al, we found nothin' to do but pick peaches or cotton. I hate it."

Jimmy didn't like California either. "I've still got kinfolks in St. Louis," he declared. "I want to go back there and try to get a job."

"You won't get no job," said Evan. "There ain't no jobs in the city. My brother is tryin' to buy a piece of land down South. Then he's gonna call me down to work it with him."

We all remained quiet for a while. Then Evan added, "If we don't get pushed into war. Then I'll have to go get my head shot off in the war. I hope we stay out."

It was mighty peaceful at that moment. The hot sun seemed to still everything in sight. We could hear nothing except our own voices.

Stay out . . . too good to die . . .

The night before we had crouched over a dilapidated radio and listened to the President of our country talk about this war. ". . . remain neutral in action, but I can't expect each citizen to remain neutral in thought."

We had been puzzled. President Roosevelt had once spoken clearly, leaving no room for puzzlement. "I hate war," he had once said. Young Jimmy and Evan and the five of us—were we to remain neutral in action but not in thought?

Evan laughed bitterly. "Don't know as I much care what happens if my brother doesn't get that land. But I'd rather die clean than a bloody mess."

A few days later we were to read in the papers that President Roosevelt had called a special session of Congress to

amend the Neutrality Act so that the United States might sell supplies to Great Britain and France. Was this being "neutral in action but not in thought"? We remembered how the Spanish Republic had pleaded for the right to purchase arms in order to defend its legally elected democratic government. The Neutrality Act had also been amended then—but to make it more strict in its application.

Under a larger tree, across from the manager's office, a dozen men squatted. Large straw five-and-dime hats shaded their brown creased faces.

"There's gonna be war." By this time, it had become a rumbling chant.

"We got a pluckin' in the last war," a gangling fellow declared, rubbing the stubble under his chin. "We ought to know better this time."

"We got no business in a war." An elderly man let out the words in a thick drawl. "We don't start it. The fellas that start it don't fight it."

The gangling man spoke up again. "They call us 'migr-ho-to-ry' workers and say we're no darn good. But watch how fast they'll come runnin' after us when they want us to fight their war. It's none of our affair. We ought to keep out."

The chant almost split our heads. "There's gonna be war. There's gonna be war. There's gonna be . . ."

But a new chant was being taken up. "Stay out. Stay out. Stay out." The chant began to grow around us in the migratory camps in California and follow us clear across the country on our way home.

Feudalism, we had learned in our history books, prevailed around the years 1300 to 1500. The teacher had drawn a

feudal manor on the blackboard—where the serfs lived, where the lord lived, where the tradesmen lived, where the crops were grown, how the lord guarded his manor, etc. But we saw a feudal manor in California, and we talked with its lord. It was called the Tagus Ranch.

"Tagus—the world's largest nectarine, peach, and apricot orchard." An enormous sign on Highway 99 told us before we reached the 7,000-acre ranch. We passed the Tagus gas station, the Tagus café and bar, the Tagus general store and the Tagus general office. We parked our car in front of the last and stopped a young barefoot boy, wearing torn overalls and a straw hat.

"We want to see the ranch," George announced. "Where do we find the boss?"

"Ask in there." The boy pointed to the general office.

"Is Huelett C. Merritt, Jr., the head boss?"

"Naw, the old man Merritt is the head. But he's down on Pasadena Beach throwing colored balloons to purty girls. His son is boss now."

The office might have been transplanted from a Wall Street skyscraper. Leather armchairs, rows of small offices, six secretaries to ask after our business. A low bench near the door, occupied by overalled Mexican and American workers, reminded us this was really a ranch in California. They sat silently, with expressionless faces. A youngish, efficient-looking man came out of an inner office and handed each of them a small slip of paper. They took them and left without a word.

One of the six secretaries eyed our now-soiled and wrinkled clothes. She received coldly the news that we were writing a book about America, and that we wanted to see Mr. Merritt, who was a part of America.

"Huelett C. Merritt, Jr., is busy entertaining guests at his home, but I'll call him and find out if he will see you."

We sat down on the bench where the overalled workers had waited. In ten minutes, the secretary returned.

"Mr. Merritt will see you now," she said, sniffing disdainfully as we filed past her. We were shown into a large air-cooled office in the rear. Huelett Clint Merritt, Jr., was seated at the head of a long conference table. He gestured toward the tall-backed chairs about the table, and we sat down, Lillian on his right, Joe on his left, Mel at the opposite end, and George and Helen across from each other.

He was a puffy, lordly little person. His green tweed suit and matching tie blended in Christmas fashion with his plump red face. His right eye blinked continually at us.

"I suppose you've all been reading the lies in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Factories in the Field*," he began in a nasal voice. Without waiting for our reply, he continued. "All this ridiculous misrepresentation. I tell you, my wife is so mad at John Steinbeck she can't eat properly."

He pulled a scrapbook from a leather portfolio with the initials A. C. M. embossed in gold on it. "Now look at these." He opened the book. "Adorable, white cozy cottages. You and I couldn't ask for more."

We looked.

"That's where our workers live," Mr. Merritt informed us. "See these lovely gardens? We encourage them to raise flowers, and each year we give prizes for the best gardens."

"Do the workers get these homes free?" Joe asked.

"Well, no. We like them to feel that these houses are their very own. So we ask them to pay small rentals. Two dollars per month for one-room houses, two-fifty for two rooms, and three dollars for three rooms. Isn't that reasonable?"

"How much are the workers paid?"

"Our average wage is twenty-five cents an hour. The average annual wage is \$750, and sometimes more. Now that's better than what a bank clerk earns, isn't it?"

With every statement, he added a rhetorical question; he seemed to be on the defensive. Maybe he felt persecuted, though we were awfully polite and took down everything he said. Of course, after we had left him, we checked back on the information he had given us and found some startling contradictions against other sources. For instance, a Tagus worker told us the annual average wage was \$300. According to another, the history of the rentals on the Tagus houses was as follows: Two years before, the Merritts raised wages for pickers from twenty-five cents to thirty cents and began to charge rent for the first time. The next year, wages were again lowered to twenty-five cents, but rent on the houses continued.

"People work and live here all year around," Mr. Merritt said. "When they're not working, they don't pay rent."

We wrote that down in our notebooks and later read it to a gaunt Mexican who had lived on the ranch for four years. "Sure," the worker said, his eyes narrowing, "sure, he lets us stay when there is no work, then we owe him money for back rent and cannot leave the land. If we try, we are arrested."

But we didn't know about these conflicting accounts as we sat in the comfortable, air-cooled office. We just listened as Mr. Merritt talked about Tagus. "I guess I'm really a socialist at heart," he said. "I like to think of Tagus as one large, happy family. We never hire anyone from the outside. Everyone rises from the ranks, working their way up the fruit-picking ladder of success.

"You know, every week I hold court here, in this office. I like the workers to come to me with their little stories and

troubles. They just sit around this table like you're doing now and talk to me."

He arose suddenly and went over to his desk, returning with a stack of circulars.

"But I'm always being hounded by these agitators. Look at these." He gave us a copy of the circular.

Tagus Ranch Workers . . .

ARE YOU MEN

OR MICE?

Mice are satisfied to live, crouching, in dark, dirty holes, eating crumbs and scraps of food. . . .

But men want to live in decent, clean, comfortable homes . . . with wholesome, abundant food for themselves and their families!

Can 25 cents an hour buy you such necessities of life?

**CERTAINLY NOT!**

Now is the time to organize, to use your constitutional rights and bargain collectively for fairer living wages and working conditions.

The circular called the workers to a meeting of agricultural workers in Tulare County, sponsored by the Council of Agricultural Workers Organizations. Merritt reached for the circular and turned it face down.

"They circulated that thing on *my* ranch on *my* time," he almost shouted. "They gave out more than 2,000 of them in both English and Spanish. I know who they are. They're communists. I put two of them—Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker—in prison a few years ago, and I'll do it again. I know who they are, those trouble-makers! Honestly, you have no idea how much trouble those agitators can stir up.

"Of course, none of my men wanted to go to that meeting. So I had to demand that four of my men go down there to find out who was there. If I don't take precautions, first

thing you know those communists will start a strike out here."

He led us out the back entrance to his car. "I'll try to show you as much as possible," he said. "It would take days to see it all, you know. It's 104 miles around the ranch." We climbed onto the blue plush seats. "First we'll see the homes."

They didn't look so cozy, nor so white. As a matter of fact, they didn't look like the pictures in the scrapbook.

"I don't like to invade the privacy of their homes," Mr. Merritt said, when we asked if we might see the inside of one of the gray, worn homes. So we were not able to judge for ourselves the truth of what we later were told—that these houses could not keep out cold, heat, or wind, that the roofs leaked, that the walls and ceilings were warped, that there was no electricity or gas or plumbing and that the only toilet facilities available were old-time outhouses, twenty feet in back of the homes.

"We try to place families in homes with more than one room. That's why I'm so opposed to the federal migratory camps, to tell you the truth. All their houses have only one room. Now how can you expect a family to enjoy the delicacy of touch or the tenderness of heart so dear to us when they all live in one room? It's immoral."

"Do all the houses lack plumbing?" Lillian asked bluntly.

"Really," he replied, blinking his right eye, "it would be cheaper to put in plumbing. But the outhouses are more sanitary, and the people like them better. Besides, these people aren't educated enough to use regular plumbing. They wouldn't understand modern toilets."

He drove up to a large square area crowded with tents.

"This is how we train them when they first come to us," he explained. "They have to be house-broken. We have to

teach them how to be clean and neat. This is where we do it, until they learn how to live in one of our houses."

A group of men near one of the tents looked at Merritt, seated at the wheel of the car. Their eyes narrowed in motionless faces as they stared. They said nothing. They were being house-broken. House-breaking? Strikebreaking, more likely, for Tagus had a system—the Merritt System—whereby a surplus of labor was kept on hand constantly as a threat to the workers' jobs in case of a strike.

Merritt passed rapidly on, stopping next before another group of "cozy cottages." The 2,500 workers employed on the ranch were housed in groups, so that Mexicans were separated from the Americans, and both nationalities were divided among themselves, "because we have to be careful of epidemics. One day without picking when the crop gets ripe would ruin our profits." Perhaps he was referring to that contagious and dreaded disease—unionism?

We spotted some tents hidden behind the houses.

"Do workers live in tents after they are house-broken too?" Mel asked, pointing.

"Oh," said the lord of the ranch, "that's a mistake. Tents aren't allowed."

"Maybe some kids are playing Indian," Lillian suggested.

"Probably." He frowned, and turned the car around quickly. Next stop was a foreman's home.

"Our foremen have better homes, with modern plumbing. They can appreciate a higher type of living. You just can't expect much from the ordinary worker. We have Americanization classes taught by the American Legion for them, and we try to raise them to a higher level. We have a school of our own on the ranch for the children. Every year we give a party for the children. I personally award the child with the best attendance record a whole new outfit of clothes

and a purse with five dollars in it. You can't expect to give a prize for brilliance to these people."

Workers were given their choice of being paid in cash or in brass. The latter was a form of company scrip honored only at Tagus stores and enterprises, where, we were told, prices were a third higher than elsewhere in the county.

Jim McGowan, short and chubby secretary of the Council of Agricultural Workers Organizations later told us that Tagus was being organized. More than 500 Tagus workers had attended the meeting called for in the circular Merritt showed us. The Council embraced 9,000 workers represented in the Workers' Alliance, the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Affiliated Workers of America (UCAPAWA), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other groups.

The Council was working toward a minimum wage. In this way, the old technique of the big farmers of bringing down the wage by calling in more workers than could be hired would be combated.

As we returned with Mr. Merritt to his office, he showed us his private sub-station-radio. After the strike experience of a few years back, he had donated a radio station to the Tulare police and kept part of it for himself. All the foremen and straw bosses on the ranch were deputized. The very minute "trouble" started, Huelett Clint Merritt, Jr., and the radio station, together with the deputies and police, could go into action.

"I have a lot of fun with the radio. I can give orders and keep in touch with every part of the ranch, without stepping out of the office."

Ray Edwards helped a lot in times of trouble. We discovered that he was an exception to the Tagus rule of rising from the ranks. The Merritts hired him after he had proved

his mettle as a member of the Tulare police force on duty at the Tagus strike. He was reputed to have been fired from the force for excessive drinking. Then the Tagus Ranch hired him.

We had almost underestimated Mr. Merritt, Jr. Now we knew what he was capable of in protecting Tagus for the Merritt family. He was a powerful man—director of eleven large corporations, including mines, railroads and canneries, chairman of six different price-setting commissions, leader and one of the founders of the Associated Farmers.

Yet he was worried. About peaches.

"You should see those pickers. When they get thirsty, they take a large, luscious one and bite into it. Then they throw it away," he complained.

But that was not all. He was worried about losing money. So we checked up. An item in a Tulare newspaper noted the fact that Tagus freestones had brought a good price in 1939—*fifty dollars a ton*. Two years before, a ton of freestones had brought \$21.50. In 1938 a ton had sold for \$7.50.

"We have to watch our step," he told us, after mentioning all the mines, canneries, cotton gins, big buildings and land he controlled. "If we don't, all the Mexicans and ignorant workers will be in our shoes, and we'll be in theirs. Things can't go on the way they have. We're going to change the Wagner Act and get rid of that La Follette Committee. Watch and see."

As we were leaving, he bestowed upon us three gifts. The first was a copy of a speech he had delivered before the Pro-American Society the previous month. We thought of his unique manner of blinking his right eye, so that every time he made some characteristic, forceful statement, he seemed to be kidding himself. One statement in that speech was:

"When I say 'Capitalist' and 'Laborer' I do not know why

I make that distinction, for the Capitalist is merely a Laborer under another name."

The second gift was a copy of *The Commentator*, dated November 1938, in which was printed an article called "The Merritt System," by Frank J. Taylor. "Tagus Ranch," Mr. Taylor had written, "is even more remarkable for the things that do not meet the eye."

The third gift was a generous assortment of large cans of peaches, apricots, and nectarines—samples of his produce. We brought them to the school storeroom at the Arvin federal migratory camp. The children were given free lunches there.

We had sensed a lot of things that did not meet the eye at Tagus, but we wanted to know more. We went to see Mr. Merritt's former chauffeur—now Police Chief Samuel T. Locke of Tulare. On his desk were a large picture of President Roosevelt and a small, framed certificate of membership in the San Joaquin Valley Peace Officers Association. The Chief was thin and bald.

"Do you have much trouble with the workers on Tagus Ranch?" we asked.

"Eh? Oh, Tagus. No, we don't bother with what they do out there. If anyone gets drunk or causes a little trouble, and if Edwards or Mr. Merritt wants to stick a fellow in the jug to cool off, we bring him in."

"Edwards used to be a member of the police force here, didn't he?"

"Yes, that's right." The Chief looked up quickly, and ran the back of his hand over his long, sharp nose.

"Was Edwards fired?"

"No, he wasn't fired. He just left the force to take a better job." The Chief smiled. "He's getting better pay, and he's got an important position."

"He's a deputy sheriff, isn't he?"

"Well, yes," he spoke slowly. "A lot of things can come up, and it's damn nice to have someone on the ranch with the authority of sheriff." He swayed back in the swivel chair. "We have numbered police cars, all equipped with radios. One car is always on the ranch. Whenever we want 'em to do anything, we just buzz 'em."

"Are they equipped for two-way?"

"No."

"Then whenever Mr. Merritt has to tell the radio car on his ranch anything, he just buzzes you, and you buzz the car?"

Chief Locke smiled and reached for a cigarette. "Come on, do you want to see the set?" he asked quickly.

He rose and we followed him to a larger room. On a long table near the door was a large black sending set with a small, silvery microphone.

"Mr. Merritt told us he donated this set to the force."

"Well, if Mr. Merritt told you . . ." The Chief's sentence petered out.

"We also hear you've got a nice arsenal here," George said.

"Yes. Yes, we've got a nice one. Do you want to see it?"

He took a small key from his pocket and led us to a tall steel cabinet in another room. Six or seven long rifles and a squat gun rested vertically against notches in the lower half of the cabinet. Boxes filled the upper half.

"This is our Thompson sub-machine gun," the Chief said proudly as he took the squat gun into his hands. "We're prepared for any kind of trouble. You see," he demonstrated, "you hold the gun like this, and—" He pointed it at Joe.

"Hey! Take it easy!" Joe backed away.

The Chief roared and put back the machine gun. "These are our rifles, and up here we keep the gas bombs." He reached up to the shelves and took down a few boxes. "This is vomiting gas." He hefted an oval black bomb in his hand. "You see, you just pull this thing, and then you throw it. They're pretty bad." He replaced it and took out another. "And this is the tear gas bomb."

"What company makes those bombs?"

"It says here on the box, wait a minute. Here it is. 'The Federal Gas and Cartridge Company.'"

We had heard of their like, companies investigated by the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee, and accused of selling weapons to put down riots that had been encouraged by their own men.

We were beginning to understand what Carey McWilliams meant when he wrote in his book:

Having every attribute of industrial organization, California agriculture continues to masquerade behind the disguise of "the farm." It is no longer "agriculture" in the formerly understood sense of the term, but a mechanized industry, owned and operated by corporations and not by farmers, and closely identified with the large financial interests which dominate industrial operations.

General Motors in Cleveland had been protected by cruising police cars loaded with tear gas too.

That night we decided we needed some relaxation, and appropriated our supper money for a movie. The picture was called *Captain Fury* and told the story of a sort of Robin Hood in Australia who defended the poor peasants against the rich landowners.

We didn't see anyone from the Merritt Ranch at the picture.

5

*At Long Row's End the Boss Man wait,  
Nail you up in a wooden crate.  
At six-bits a hundred livin's hard,  
But dyin's dear in the County Yard—  
At twenty-five bucks a hundred weight!*

Before returning to Bakersfield, we thought we might make a little money picking cotton. Fred Ross and Mrs. Rankin warned us, but we wanted to try. The cotton picking season would start in two weeks. When we asked a foreman for jobs, we were told:

"We want families."

They wanted mothers and fathers and aunts and uncles and cousins and brothers and babies to work in the fields. They were intending to pay eighty cents per hundred pounds for picking cotton. The Workers' Alliance and the Council of Agricultural Workers Organizations were asking \$1.25. A big, strong man averaged from 250 to 300 pounds, working from sunup to sundown. The whole family had to work in order to live on those wages! If we had tried it, the five of us would have averaged about a hundred pounds together, because we didn't know how. And then we would have had to stay in bed for a week with sore backs.

We headed for the Board of Supervisors meeting instead. Mrs. Rankin awaited us. About fifty others had come to see the supervisors at work. Dark, sun-burned people, dressed in faded blue overalls, they sat on the solid, pew-like benches and watched the chairman, Roy Woolomes

("that fat fella—he's not on our side"), mechanically intone: "All those in favor say aye—contraminded—so ordered." The other two supervisors present—"Charlie Wimmer's on our side, C. W. Harty, he's not on our side"—had buried their noses at the start of the meeting. They didn't lift their heads as they grunted their "ayes" to Woolomes.

The meeting dragged along with the chairman's voice. Our eyes wandered from a small, light-haired child sucking his thumb to the framed Constitution and American and California flags draped above the head of the droning chairman.

"I guess two of the supervisors are absent," Mrs. Rankin whispered. "They're not going to bring up the banning of Steinbeck's book." She rose quickly and walked to the front of the room. Leaning over the rail, she asked loudly:

"Are you going to lift the ban on *The Grapes of Wrath*?"

"There ain't no ban," the paunchy chairman replied. He scratched his shoulder and lumbered close to Mrs. Rankin. "There ain't no ban. We just requested the library to remove the book, and they did."

"Are you going to ask that the book be put back in the library?"

"The book is a lie," Woolomes said slowly with a poker face.

"It's the truth, and you know it," Mrs. Rankin shot back.

"Did you ever hear of camps bein' burned down?"

"I know of strikers bein' shot!"

"I don't know anything about that," Woolomes said exasperated.

"Well, you should!" Her eyes were hard upon him. "You was there!"

The onlookers, who had jacked themselves up in their seats when Mrs. Rankin had arisen, snickered.

"We're not here today to talk about that book!" Woolomes lost control, his large face turned red. "They was only Mexicans anyway! You're out of order!"

Mrs. Rankin smiled and walked back to her seat.

"Let's go," she said. "They're not going to lift the ban."

Bill Moses, a young cub reporter on the *Bakersfield Californian*, had asked us to come in after lunch for an interview. We arranged to meet Mrs. Rankin in an hour for a tour of some migratory slums. After we had our pictures taken and answered a lot of questions about the West as we who were from the East saw it, we headed for the near-by Hoovervilles.

Three per cent of the migrants were housed in government camps. How did the others live? In the little booklets given to us by California real estate offices, we saw all kinds of homes—one-story and three-story, stucco and shingle, white and green, colonial and old Spanish models. The agricultural workers in California had all kinds of homes too. Ditch bank models with old cardboard box roofs. Weedpatch tents, torn and dirty, holding families of eight and ten. Camps on city dumps. Jungle slums, fashioned from soap boxes and pounded out of tin cans, held together by rags. Owned by mayors and chiefs of police.

Two years before, Mrs. Rankin explained as she guided us about, the shacks were torn down and the inhabitants driven off. Gradually, the workers returned and built their homes again. These models of housing for the migrants were the oldest and the neatest. We could tell that by walking down the narrow dusty paths dividing one row of houses from the other. Large piles of discarded automobile parts and broken chairs told the story of time in the Hoovervilles. A bit of curtain in a glassless window, a plant in a small grocery box, an attempt to fence off one home

from another told the story of the desire of these people to live cleanly and happily.

A broad-hipped woman stood near a fence, watching two men build a roof out of burned, decaying lumber.

"What are you doing, rebuilding a part of your house that burned?"

"No," she pushed back an old-fashioned sunbonnet. "That was someone else's place. We're just usin' the wood to build me a kitchen."

"What's this place called, besides Hooverville?"

"Nothin'. Hooverville's the only name she's got. She was named after President Hoover, that Ree-publican."

Two other women were conversing together as we approached. They didn't look up until we said "Hello." They examined us carefully for a few minutes, before replying.

"How are chances for jobs around here?" asked Helen.

"Wa-a-al, there's some jobs up north a-ways. They're payin' a cent and a quarter," the brown, thin one replied. She kept turning the two rings on her engagement finger.

"Humph! Cent and a quarter," the other woman said. "You cain't earn nuthin' workin' that way. I tried it, an' I couldn't earn worth a meal."

"Missus McLeary went out today. She said she wuz gonna pick grapes. There's some grape-pickin' work now," the thin one informed.

"You aimin' to stay here?" asked the other. "Sure would liven things up to have some young folks here. Most of our young folks leave as soon as they're able. If you're aimin' to stay here, I'll give you a hint. When you're pickin' grapes, you don't have to cut them off, just pull them off. The boss doesn't lose money, and you save yourself some work. Do as I tell ya."

The thin woman became more friendly. She was from Louisiana, she told us. "I'm forty-two years old, and I've got three grandchildren," she declared proudly.

Her friend, not to be outdone, said: "I've got *eight* grandchildren, and I'm only sixty!"

"Lord knows what's gonna happen to all them kids, now that we got 'em. Mine'll never set foot in the fields if I kin help it. And they won't do housework for them ladies Rich-Bitch either."

They stared at us critically. "Sure do wish you folks would settle here. There's nuthin' to do here but set. Young folks like you would liven things up."

When we explained that we could not settle there, they turned away and forgot us. We hurried over to the Labor Temple to see Dan Harris.

"Hey, Jim!" he called. "Those New York kids are back! Watch out! Be careful what you say!"

The invisible Jim in the next office yelled back, "Okay!" We told Dan about all the things we had seen. Dan's face grew solemn as he heard our story.

"Say, you kids ought to be called to testify before the La Follette Committee," he declared. "They're out here to investigate the Associated Farmers."

We were not called to testify before the Committee, but we read of its findings. Members of the Committee were assaulted when they visited the scene of a strike meeting in the town of Madera. The cotton pickers suffered from that "disease" Clint Merritt feared—organization. They went out on strike. Large mobs of vigilantes broke up their meetings and raided strike headquarters. The sheriff at Madera was W. O. ("With-Out") Justice.

The La Follette Committee found that industrialists—oil companies, banks, railroads, canneries and utilities—had

provided funds for the Associated Farmers. The members of the Committee heard evidence from farmers, migrant workers, police officials, union organizers and industrialists. It was brought out that Joseph di Giorgio, head of the \$10,500,000 di Giorgio Fruit Corporation and its subsidiary, the \$5,500,000 Earl Fruit Company had played a leading role in organizing the Associated Farmers.

The Committee's report told a story of bloodshed and violence. We had seen the reasons for that violence. Government committees reported the reasons officially. John Steinbeck wrote movingly about them. . . .

The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed and they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered with quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

And what was going to be done?

That night Dan took us to dinner at his house. Fried chicken, old California style, Spanish beans, relishing appetizers to start us off again toward more chicken, luscious cakes, home-baked bread. We feasted.

And what was going to be done?

Many pounds heavier than we had been in the morning, we fell into the car and started back to Los Angeles.

6

Pat Kiloran, a bright-eyed reporter, had never walked on a picket line in her life until the Hollywood *Citizen-News* went out on strike. Pat belonged to the Newspaper Guild, and she went out with the rest of them. She had learned a lot of things in that strike, and the Irish in her got her dander up about them. She emerged from the Guild victory to continue her work on the newspaper, but she took on the additional job of secretary of the John Steinbeck Committee in Hollywood.

The Steinbeck Committee was formed in the fall of 1938. Comprising movie stars, writers, screen technicians, artists, college professors and journalists, the committee set about to aid the migratory workers by collecting clothing and money, backing legislation and attempts to organize the workers. Everyone on the committee was employed in other work. All time was given voluntarily.

"We get everyone to help us," Pat said, "the merchants, Boy Scouts and even the American Legion. They're suspicious at first, because we make no bones about helping UCAPAWA, the CIO union. But when we show them the real plight of these workers, they realize unions are not so bad.

"Oh, I get so mad when some of our well-fed pillars of society say that these migrants don't *want* to work. The stories I know! Just let me tell you about one man. He had three little children and a wife to support. He had a job picking crops fifteen miles away and drove back and forth every day. When he returned from work, he would spend hours building a house of corrugated tin. In the meantime, the family lived under an old canvas covering. When the house was completed, the family moved inside

and had a little celebration. Then the authorities came along. They tore down the house. They made this man move away. They said he was littering up the land."

Pat's face reddened.

"I get so mad when I think of these things. Do you know that of eighteen babies who died in the Kern County hospital, fifteen of the fathers were employed in agriculture, one was unemployed, one was employed in other work and one was on relief? The health officer said the babies died from 'inflammation of the bowels.' We call it starvation."

We had seen two federal migratory camps, but the third one was different. It was the mobile unit in the program. We found it at Lakeview, in the Imperial Valley. The mobile camp made three moves during the year. From the middle of September until April, it was stationed at Kalpatrin; from April until June at Cherry Valley; and from July to September at Lakeview, where we found it.

Jim Collins, director, had a combination home and office in a neat trailer. Another trailer carried the medical clinic. Platforms, lights, showers, toilets, recreation hall, nursery—all were carried on movable equipment. The annual cost of the mobile unit was \$30,000, while the stationary camps cost \$300,000 a year.

"These are fine people here. Seventy per cent of them have been farmers according to our registration. Once they come here, they blossom out and become part of a friendly community." Jim Collins spoke deeply, sincerely.

Everything was movable or collapsible—including the nursery school. Naps in the afternoon for the kids, hot lunches, a nursery teacher from the Farm Security Adminis-

tration—no wonder “every youngster who attended the nursery school gained five pounds”!

A tremendous truck carried the thirteen-ton power plant which generated electricity. It was the only one of its kind in the country. A migratory automatic oil burner, boiler for hot water! Its water was piped from the local community's tanks.

Showers on wheels, one for the women and one for the men. Pipe lines carried hot water from the power truck to the shower trucks.

“Showers . . . gee . . . wish we had one with us.”

As we talked with Collins, a Japanese farmer, dressed in overalls and a large straw hat approached.

“Got any help?” he asked. “I need some men.”

“Go down there and talk to the men,” Collins advised, pointing to the group of men standing before one of the tents. “I never butt into the hiring of workers,” he explained to us as the Japanese walked toward the group. “We want them to feel independent, that this camp is their own. It's their community, and it's for them to run it.”

From Lakeview we drove farther south to Indio. As we came deeper into the Imperial Valley, we saw more and more of the wreckage left by the recent flood. Flocks of crickets swarmed about us. At first, we squirmed every time a cricket lighted on our coats or arms. But we became accustomed to them, for they infested the entire country between Indio and New Orleans. About ten o'clock at night we stopped at the Indio Migratory Camp and watched an amateur show. Then we sped on to Brawley.

Brawley, in the heart of the Imperial Valley, was submerged in four feet of water. We splashed through the streets, the valises in the rack at the side of the car getting

covered with thick mud. Carey McWilliams had suggested that we look up Nelson's auto camp.

At two o'clock in the morning, Nelson's auto camp was dark and silent. Joe and George took the flashlight and reconnoitered. In five minutes, they returned. Ed Nelson was there, but he wouldn't see us or take us into the cabins.

The next morning we learned why.

"I don't get up at night for anyone," Ed Nelson told us. "The Associated Farmers and their vigilantes are out gunning for me. They've threatened me a couple of times. I have to be careful."

Forty-five men had been killed already for trying to organize the agricultural workers in the Valley. The biggest Imperial farmer was the Bank of America, controlling one-third of the land in the Valley. They didn't play gently.

"A Civil Liberties lawyer came here once to speak. Someone called him to the phone at the Planters Hotel. Seventeen men grabbed him and took him to the desert, stripped him, beat him and tossed him into a ditch. . . ."

Nelson took us to see the Mexican section in Brawley. The rains had washed out the roads and left wide pools and streams. Barefoot dark Mexican girls and boys played in the mud. The quarter was fenced off from the rest of Brawley. Rows of shacks, built from packing crates and bits of torn canvas, like the homes of the migratory workers, stood close together. We walked by these sheds, the Mexicans staring at us coldly. A little boy wearing nothing but a ragged pair of shorts was pulling a goat out of a mud hole. When he saw us, he ran to some other small children and jabbered quickly in Spanish. The children circled around us.

"Penny, meester? Penny?"

They all approached slowly.

"Will you take a picture with us?" asked George.

The little boy who had left the goat nodded. George gave the circle some pennies and took the picture. We walked down the narrow muddy pathway between the rows of shacks. One-room shacks. Naked babies sleeping with open mouths on piles of dirty blankets. Flies and mosquitoes covered them like a black rash. No toilets—not even outhouses. No running water. Trash and filth. We could not believe this was the United States, the Imperial Valley, one of the richest agricultural centers in the world.

A little boy in long corduroy trousers, stripped to the waist, came over to our car as we left Brawley. A mongrel dog played with him. "Ah like dogs," he said. "Ah lost my dog. He was big. He broke his collar and jumped off our truck. We looked all over for him, but couldn't find him. Maybe he tried to go back home."

He watched Mel tighten the ropes holding our luggage at the side of the car.

"What kind of dog was he?" Mel asked, frowning at the muddy valises.

"German police dog. He lived with us on the farm."

"Where are you from? Oklahoma?"

"No, Ah'm from Texas. We had a nice farm there, but we had to leave. Once mah mother tried to whip me. She just got in one lick, and mah dog jumped on her. He sure was mah friend." He smiled, showing spaces between his teeth.

"Do you go to school?"

"Uh-huh, in El Centro. The other kids make fun of me, because Ah ain't got shoes. But Ah don't care. Ah have a lot of fun with mah dog."

El Centro was about ten miles south of Brawley. In the

small, dusty office of the Imperial Valley A. F. of L., Walter Weldon told us about a murder. Weldon, secretary-treasurer of the Imperial Valley Central Labor Council, said the murder "mystery" would answer our question about "violence" in the Valley.

On April 7, 1938, two men saw a car parked in the desert near the road to Plaster City. A week later, they saw the same car, standing in the same lonely spot. They investigated and found the body of a dead man—George Kildow.

Kildow was the organizer for the 'Teamsters' Union in the Valley. He led the organization of truck drivers who drove the farmers' produce to the market. If the trucking costs, including wages, could be kept low, the farmers would realize higher profits. Kildow had led the fight for higher wages. . . .

The body of the dead man appeared to have been thrown into the car. One foot was draped over the steering wheel, the other on the floor, and one hand hung outside the right door. A gun lay on the running board. Its muzzle was pointed toward the motor.

The doctor testified that the bullet entered the left side of his chest below the collarbone and came out below the lowest ribs about three inches to the right of the spinal column. It would have been possible for Kildow to shoot himself only if he held the gun in a very awkward position and pulled the trigger with his thumb. No fingerprints were found on the gun.

The sheriff and district attorney conducted an investigation. The jury brought in a verdict that Kildow was killed by a bullet fired by himself or some other person. Who was the other person? Nobody dared say.

General Moseley, in testifying before the Dies Committee, stated that he wished he were back in the "serene, pure

atmosphere" of the Imperial Valley, in the spring. Kildow was murdered in the spring of 1938. That year, John Steinbeck wrote:

The spring is rich and green in California this year. In the fields the wild grass is ten inches high, and in the orchards and vineyards the grass is deep and nearly ready to be plowed under to enrich the soil. Already the flowers are starting to bloom. Very shortly one of the oil companies will be broadcasting the locations of the wild-flower masses. It is a beautiful spring.

There has been no war in California, no plague, no bombing of open towns and roads, no shelling of cities. It is a beautiful year. And thousands of families are starving in California. . . .

## Chapter 8 LONE STAR STATE

✿ A high wire fence marked the border between Mexico and the United States. At Calexico, a clean California town with wide paved streets, American guards asked us why we were leaving the United States. Mexican guards asked us why we were entering.

We entered Mexicali—another world. The wide paved street ended as soon as we had filed past the guards. Muddy ruts led us into this other country, but did they characterize Mexico? We remembered the muddy crooked streets in the Mexican section of Brawley.

High-cheeked, brown-skinned natives wearing sombreros and dark overalls leaned against the low tilted store fronts.

We were *gringos*, tourist *gringos*, to them. We combed the gift shops, trying to stretch the small sums of “personal money” to cover huarachos, wooden belts, Mexican cigarettes, book ends, sombreros and bandannas.

A Mexican Indian stopped us on the street and asked for some money for a “coop ov coffee.”

Two small black-eyed Mexican boys watched us in amusement. "*Allo, gringos,*" they said and snickered.

"*Buenas noches,*" answered Joe, proud of the little Spanish he had learned from the movies.

The two youngsters laughed loudly. "*Buenas noches* mean good night. Eet is not night now."

Joe pointed to his shoes. "What are these?"

"*Zapatos.*" They laughed again as Joe stamped his feet and said, "*Zapatos* hurt."

Mel kicked a large black cricket. "What do you call those?" he asked.

"*Grillos,*" the smaller of the two boys said. He picked one up.

"Hell of a lot of *grillos* around here," said Mel.

Black-haired señoritas wearing tight-fitting dresses paraded up and down the muddy avenue. In a small park down the street, a fife and drum corps of small boys was practicing. We attempted to walk to the outskirts of the small town, but the muddy roads were impassable.

On our way back to our own country, the American border guards confiscated some oranges we had brought into Mexico from California. The oranges had been grown and purchased in California, but it was against the law to bring them into the country from Mexico. So careful was California in protecting the health of its citizens.

Early in the evening we started across the vast Gila Desert. At Yuma, our first stop, thick clusters of crickets hung onto the walls of buildings and blackened the streets. The moon climbed behind us as we drove into a heavy wind blowing streams of sand across the road. We watched the slow moving changes on the stage of the desert.

It took a few minutes, so it seemed, to cover a few hundred miles into Gila Bend, a long thin town of gasoline sta-

tions and open-all-night eateries. We filled up—gasoline for our car and coffee for ourselves. Lillian, disturbed by the drove of crickets, questioned the youth behind the lunch counter.

"Are those things dangerous?" she asked.

"Sure," he replied. "They get into your soup when you're not looking."

"I won't have soup then. What else annoys people around here?"

"Oh, we have Gila monsters, scorpions and rattlesnakes. You'd better be careful."

We didn't have a hard time staying awake on this desert. We held our breaths as crickets pasted to the windows of the car dropped inside or crawled up the seat.

In the gray dawn Tucson broke the desert with the cheerful twinkle of restaurants and the blue eerie light of a newspaper plant. We could see the scrubs and cacti of the desert as we climbed gradually into the Arizona hills and leveled off onto a plateau.

Tombstone, a monument of the old mining days, stood dead and awkward among the ruins. Was this the tough little town of the rootin'-shootin' West? A small school building seemed as deserted and dead as a large swinging-door saloon. Other old mining towns, like Douglas twenty miles away, seemed lost in the smoky haze of a copper smelting plant. A waitress told us the war had started a boom in the plant. "But," she continued, "the men—my man works in the plant—didn't get a cent raise."

A tremendous wasteland lay before us, purposeless and idle. For miles not a house, not a fence blemished the immovable face of the earth. We saw no people. We passed a car every other hour or so. We saw black vultures feeding on the carcasses of dead jackrabbits. We remembered

the dead, dry land in Kansas and the thousands of homeless farmers in California.

A few miles from the New Mexico border we passed a stone monument commemorating the surrender of Geronimo, the Apache chief who fought the invasion of the white men. Small roadside signs symbolized the victory of that invasion and the substitution of the white man's culture:

READ RANCH ROMANCE

LOVE AND ADVENTURE IN THE WEST

and

THIS IS GOD'S COUNTRY

DON'T DRIVE THROUGH IT LIKE HELL

At Deming, a dry and dusty town, we saw another sign:

TURN HERE FOR CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

CAMP MIRAGE

We turned. The long green buildings and shops appeared like a fresh oasis. We stopped the car close to a large cage holding a young eagle, an owl and a snake. The eagle was tearing apart and devouring a rabbit while the owl and the snake watched stoically.

In the camp office, Captain Staiger and Company Commander Pain greeted us coldly.

"What do you want to know?" asked the Captain.

"What kind of work do the boys in the camp do?" George began.

"They fence in grazing land, build dams to prevent soil erosion, build stock tanks and then they learn some trade in the school we've got here."

"On whose land do you do all this work?" asked Helen.

The Captain gazed at her suspiciously. "Say, those newspaper clippings you showed me said there were five of you. Where's the other one?"

We started. "Oh, you mean Mel! He's sleeping in the car. We've driven for two days without stopping for any sleep."

"Oh," said the Captain. "Now what do you want to know?"

Helen repeated her question.

"The boys work on private land, owned by farmers here. We do that work for the farmers and the cattlemen after they agree to cut down on the number of cattle to prevent over-grazing the land and over-production on the market."

He explained that the boys worked six hours a day and put in another hour at the trade school. The full strength of the camp was 200. For their work, the boys were paid thirty dollars a month, the assistant leaders got thirty-six dollars, and the officers and clerks forty-five dollars—about the same pay as the regular army men receive.

"The pay is the same," the Captain continued, "the uniforms are almost the same, and retired army officers lead the boys. But what you hear about the CCC being a military training ground is the bunk. The CCC was created to give jobs and training to unemployed youth and to provide a work force to do things in the country that had to be done. The CCC wasn't created to build up a raw fighting force—not here at any rate."

"Do you have regular army discipline here?" Joe asked.

"No," the Captain replied. "We've just got a fining system for any minor infractions of the rules. A boy can be fined up to three dollars or lose some of his privileges."

"If this country went to war, would those boys be drafted as a part of the regular army?" Lillian queried.

"No. But if there was a draft, they would be included just like any young person, college student or factory worker."

"What do the boys say about the war? Would they want to go overseas and fight?"

"Offhand," the Captain returned coldly, "I'd say they wouldn't like it. But if they have to go, they'll go."

Outside, we passed a kitchen and smelled baking pies. Inside the dormitories, cots were crowded together, neatly made up. In the clinic, traveling dentists were fixing boys' teeth. We entered the amusement hall where dark- and light-skinned boys were playing ping-pong and pool.

"The Anglo boys get along very well with the Spanish-Americans," said the Captain.

We returned to our car, awoke Mel and headed back to the main highway over the rutted road.

"It looked good," George told Mel, who wanted to know what he had missed. "But I don't like the idea of the regular army bossing those kids around. If they really don't want them in the army, why can't they have civilian supervision of the camps?"

2

"Hey, look at that cowboy! Look at him ride."

We had seen better-dressed cowboys in Hollywood. This one wore a black dusty shirt and a battered felt hat. A big collie dog ran close to the light-brown horse. We stopped and watched. The dog moved up silently to the side of a heavy steer and forced it closer to the cowboy, who swung his loop and hung it swiftly over the steer's head. The dog sat on his haunches and looked up at the rider. The cowboy grinned and waved to us.

Mel tobogganed the car up and down the rounded hills,

and we came into El Paso as a heavy rainstorm broke. A hollow drumming noise sounded from the motor.

"Sounds as if we've got Gene Krupa locked under the hood," said George.

To the rest of us, it sounded like a death rattle for the Twentieth Century Unlimited.

Mel slowed the car. "Maybe it's the valves, maybe the oil rod, maybe . . ."

"And we've got thirty dollars left," groaned George.

We stopped at the first garage, learned with relief we should use bronze gas instead of red gas to keep the motor cool, rented cabins and caught up on three days' sleep in spite of the noisy rainstorm.

In the morning, we crossed the Rio Grande River into Juarez, Mexico, paying two cents per person to walk over the bridge. We became *gringos* once more. Pushcart peddlers, guides and panhandlers besieged us. A small black-haired boy approached Mel and Joe.

"Would you like a nice girl, meester?"

"No."

Street hawkers crowded the sidewalks on the long main street in front of the bars and gift shops. Old women in long black skirts carried baskets of fruit and vegetables on their heads or under their arms, walking hurriedly and ignoring the tourists.

Small crowds gathered about the newsstands talking about the war. Headlines said:

INGLATERRA LUCHAR CON ALEMANIA

Headlines on our American papers said:

ENGLAND SENDS TROOPS;

FRENCH BATTLE NAZIS

We could not understand the rapid conversation of the small groups, but we could feel what we ourselves felt—the fear of being drawn into this war . . . “neutral in action but not in thought.”

Leaving El Paso, a city much the same as any cosmopolitan city in the country, we drove into a long green valley, one of the few signs of living color we had seen in the past week. A rainstorm soon blotted out the color, and Mel slowed the car, straddling the white line in the center of the highway. The rain poured off the hills into the road so that we seemed to be driving down a river.

A red neon sign shining hazily through the thick rain drew us to a beanery. We stamped into the place. A Mexican in overalls stood at the bar. Two men dressed in khaki uniforms sat at the front booth and looked out the window.

“What’s the name of this place?” George asked one of the men in khaki.

“Fort Hancock,” answered his friend.

“How many people live here?”

“Dunno. I figure about ten or twelve. Won’t really know until the next census count.” He pointed a thumb at the other man. “He’s our census taker. He can’t find time to take an official count. He’s mayor of this town.”

“That shouldn’t take much time.”

“But he’s customs inspector, border patrolman, deputy sheriff and about everything else too.”

“What do people in this town do for a living?”

“Oh, we just sit around and predict the coming of rain. Sheriff here picked this rain to the day and hour. He’s the official weather forecaster.”

A large truck drew up to the eating place, and two Mexican youths walked in and ordered coffee. The sheriff and his man looked out the window.

"Looks like those cotton pickers they brought up from San Antonio the other day had to stop work," said the sheriff's man. "They bring those Mexicans up from the cities so they can pay 'em less money. Look at 'em now." He gestured toward the truck. "They're soaked, and they can't sleep under those burlap tents in the fields. Poor devils."

## 3

Allamore, Van Horn, Lobo, Valentine, Alpine, Altuda, Marathon . . . gas-station towns on the road to Del Rio. We would trace the thin highway line on road maps and anticipate coming into a town only to find a gasoline pump and dilapidated shacks. We remembered how Dan Harris back in Bakersfield, California, had characterized his own town.

"I know what you think," he had said. "You drive into town and say, 'Nice town we're coming to, wasn't it?'"

Mel pulled out the throttle and the car skimmed along the straight road. We waved to a tall Indian seated upright on a horse amid a flock of sheep. He was dressed in a brightly beaded leather jacket and trousers, and he nodded to us in greeting.

A long barbed-wire fence began to run parallel to the highway. Dog-like skeletons hung from the posts. The skeletons turned out to be coyotes in various stages of decay; we finally saw them in their brown fur coats, crucified to the posts.

A steep downgrade took us into the Pecos River Canyon; its rounded stones and crevices seemed to gape at us as we gaped at them.

We could do little else in this part of the country except drive all day and look, stop for the night and write. At Del

Rio we rented cabins, ate Helen's standard supper of canned soup, canned salmon, bread and jam and coffee, and then worked at our typewriters, until we could stay awake no longer. Joe and Lillian held out the longest. When Joe gave up at three in the morning, he nudged George and Mel to "move ovah" in the narrow bed, lay down on the edge, and the three boys collapsed with the bed.

We came into Uvalde early the next morning.

"So this is the place where we were going to be stranded," said Helen.

Uvalde—home of seventy-year-old John Nance Garner, Vice-President of the United States. It was hot and flat, and it looked none too prosperous.

We decided to find out about John Nance Garner. A cow hand in front of the main drug store told us: "He's everything that feller John L. Lewis called him and more. Darn right. He drinks his whisky neat and plays a mean hand of poker. And he *is* rich, believe me."

We stepped into the Hotel Kincaid and saw the famous collection of Garner gavels. The hotel clerk told us: "Too bad you missed the Vice-President. He left this morning for the special session of Congress in Washington. Want to buy some postcards of his house or family?"

We didn't buy any postcards, but we walked through the quiet streets of Uvalde to Garner's home. It was a large brick house, shaded by huge trees and shrubbery.

"Yes, he sure is rich," said a laundry man who stood idly near the post office. "He owns about everything around here, all the ranching land, the bank, that whole block over there." He waved toward a group of stores and buildings down the street.

"He wants to be the next President," the laundryman continued. He walked to the curb, held his white tie close to

his white shirt and spat tobacco juice into the street. "I guess this town'll vote for him if he runs. I don't care much one way or the other."

He lifted his straw hat and scratched the top of his head. "D'ya want to see something peculiar?" He pointed to an old gray-haired man sitting on the steps of the bank across the street. "That's Garner's brother-in-law. He always sits there. He's got nothing else to do. He can't even get a job."

"Now I'm sure I'm glad we weren't stranded in Uvalde," said Helen, as we headed out of town toward San Antonio. Cattle grazed quietly on the land. Cattle and John Nance Garner—that's all we found until we reached San Antonio.

#### NAMES . . .

Maury Maverick, Mayor

San Antonio

Friend of publisher

lunch and hospitality—sure bets

The telephone book didn't list his number. City Hall closed at six o'clock and it was three hours after that now. So we called up the Chief of Police and told him it was *imperative* that we get Mayor Maverick on the phone. He gave us the telephone number. We called. Maury, said Mrs. Maverick, had left for New York ten minutes before.

Following her instructions, we searched out a tourist camp where she would get in touch with us the next day. The camp was grandiose. We rented a three-room house with all modern conveniences—air conditioning, refrigeration, a dinette, two bedrooms, etc. The prices air-conditioned our treasury. We were down to our last twelve

dollars. People always seem to start splurging when they are near starvation.

But Joe had an idea. He wrote a letter to his college newspaper, informing the staff he was stranded. If they ever wanted to see his cherubic face again, would they start a drive at the school to "Bring Wershba Back Alive?"

Lillian had a better idea. She sat herself and the others down at the typewriters and finished off additional chapters of the book. We mailed them to our publisher in New York, crossed our fingers and went to lunch with Mrs. Maverick.

Small Mrs. Maverick was peppy and talkative. She talked while we ate. Waiters, hostesses and busboys hovered about us attentively, frowning at Joe, who unconsciously ate his roast beef from the serving platter. Mrs. Maverick said it was too bad we had missed Maury. With our mouths full of roast beef we assured her we were doing all right. Well, anyhow, she would have given us a key to the city, but they weren't ready yet. But it was too bad we had missed Maury.

We heard a lot about Maury, chunky, short and dynamic Mayor. "So you missed Maury, eh?" said Cliff Potter, San Antonio reporter. With his wife, his blonde daughter, who looked and talked like Judy Wallet in "Gasoline Alley," and Tom Brady, another reporter, he came to our luxurious house in the tourist camp. We sprawled on the beds and kitchen chairs, turned on the fans, sipped ice-water and heard about Maury Maverick.

Potter lit a cigarette, reached over to the table and carefully placed the match in the ashtray. "Have you heard about the fellas who started the riot against the communists a couple weeks ago?"

"How did the riot start?" asked Helen.

"Well, the Communist Party asked Maury for a permit

to hold a meeting in the Municipal Auditorium," Potter drawled. "Maury gave it to them. But the American Legion kicked up a fuss, said the auditorium had been built as a memorial to the war dead, and that if the communists were allowed to speak, it would be casting a blot on the war dead.

"Then the Archbishop of the Catholic Church A. J. Drossanta, issued a statement attacking the Communist Party. And a guy by the name of Herman G. Nami, a Legionnaire, issued a statement along the lines of this call-to-action stuff.

"The night of the meeting there were about 300 people inside and 10,000 milling around outside the auditorium. I was inside covering the meeting.

"When the time came to start, fiery little Emma Tena-yuca Brooks, secretary of the Communist Party in the state, got up on the platform."

Here Potter paused and shook his head. "You ought to see her. She's small and thin, couldn't hurt a cricket. Well, little Emma gets up and asks the crowd to sing the 'Star-Spangled Banner.'"

"Then it started. I looked outside and saw this mob of kids, couldn't be more than seventeen and twenty years old, throwing bricks. They were all boozed up, and some Legionnaires—you could tell them by their overseas caps—were egging these kids on.

"Well, the mob climbed through the windows into the auditorium. The people at the meeting were taken out through the back door. The mob smashed the furniture and just wrecked the auditorium. Then they paraded to the Alamo, smashing windows on the way and scaring hell out of everybody. Finally, they hung Maury in effigy. Boy, what a night!"

We sat quietly for about two minutes. "Who were the

leaders of the mob? What did the police do? Why did they have a riot?"

"Take it easy, whoa!" Potter laughed good-naturedly. He reached over and filled his glass with water from the pitcher. "Do you want some, baby?" he asked his daughter. She shook her head, the blonde curls jumping crazily, and looked at him expectantly.

"Clem Smith," Potter continued, "he's a war vet getting compensation, and he's also commander of the Legion Post. He spoke at the 'Americanization' meeting after the riot, and then he led the parade to Alamo. At the meeting Clem said, 'We have a Catholic, a Ku Kluxer and a Jew leading us tonight. I'm the Jew.'" Potter grinned wryly. Just like that.

"Gee, those kids were a shame. Young fellas, like you," he nodded at Mel, Joe and George. "Our photographer caught a shot of a kid, about eighteen. Boy! That was some shot, wasn't it, Brady?" He turned to the black-haired young reporter sprawled on the bed.

"Sure was," Brady drawled. "That kid had a stick in one hand and a big stone in the other. He was just crazy mad. They ought to stick those people in jail, that's what they ought to do. 'Americanism,'" he snorted. "They don't know what it means."

## 4

Mel and Lillian climbed the stairs to Clem Smith's photographic studio, about half a block away from the Alamo. A short man in shirt sleeves with small red eyes stood behind the counter.

"Whaddya want?" he called as we approached.

We came closer. The strong odor of whisky almost smothered us.

"We heard that you led the riot against the communists,"

said Lillian. "We're from New York, writing a book about America and some articles for magazines and newspapers."

"That's right," Smith said proudly. He held out a scaly paw, his finger nails cut short to the skin. "That's me. What do you want to write about?"

"Oh, about your opinions and explanation of the riot."

"Say," Smith stuck his head closer, "you're not members of that damn Newspaper Guild?"

"Nah," Mel and Lillian shook their heads vigorously, and under their breaths muttered, "We're not *regular* members."

"I was just making sure, that's all." His eyes creased together until only the red rims showed. "Well, here's something for you to see." He pulled a bedraggled packet of letters and newspaper clippings from under the counter. "After the stories appeared in the papers, I got letters of congratulation from all over the country. See, here is the story in the San Antonio *Light*." He read from the clipping in a hoarse voice. "See, that's me," he said, pointing to the picture of himself in the crowd.

"Are all those letters a result of the publicity?" asked Lillian.

"Damn right. Fan mail!" He smoothed his tie, fingering a tie-pin with a six-pointed Jewish star. We looked at him questioningly. "Sure," he snickered. "I'm a *good* Jew!"

We read some of his fan mail.

. . . negros [sic] and communistic jews are the trouble with this country. . . .

Gentlemen ask anyone in New York City and they will tell you the communistic foreigner and the colored are getting all the better of the native born. . . .

Form a committee and contact committees of other organizations such as the Elks, K. of C., the Masons, American Legion, VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and so forth. Have you members go into the hall in 2's or 3's in a quiet manner, and fill the place up. Have a distinctive badge (such as a plain white ribbon given each) and once they get into the place put same on, so that in case of any demonstration you will know who your friends are.

Mel asked, "What started the riot?"

"The signal was given . . ."

"You mean you arranged beforehand to give the signal? Who gave it?"

"Who d'ya think gave it?" he bellowed. Then he grinned slyly. "I don't know who gave it, but when they started to sing the 'Star-Spangled Banner' we went for them. God was on the side of the American people."

"Who led the boys in the mob?"

Smith grinned benignly. "Who d'ya think?"

A short, thin fifteen-year-old youth with a pale wrinkled face entered. "H'lo, Pop," he said dryly.

"This is my son, Buddy," said Smith. "You carried the American flag in the parade, didn't you?"

"Right, Pop," said Buddy. He took a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket, lit one and inhaled deeply.

"What do you do?" questioned Lillian.

"Go to school."

"Don't they object to your smoking at school?"

Buddy looked surprised. "Sure they object. What the hell can they do to me? They don't like me, that's all. But who the hell cares?"

Lillian gulped, and turned back to the elder Smith. "How many communists are there in San Antonio?"

"We don't know yet, but we'll find out soon. We're getting spies in there. They'll get in good with the secretary and walk home with him some night and mess him up a little bit. They won't kill him; they'll just get his membership books. Then we'll know who the communists are."

"Have you done anything like that yet?"

"Well, we've got one fella. He used to belong to the Communist Party, and he knows just how to go about it. We can't do too much of that stuff right now, don't have the organization yet. But we'll get it. You know, we have to pay those men and women."

Smith turned to Buddy, who sat silently on a chair blowing smoke rings. "Buddy, get me the constitution of the communists. I want to show it to them."

Buddy went into a back room and returned with a small black book. "Here, Pop."

"I got this here membership book from a fella who used to belong. Constitution is right here. I'll read it to you. Listen." He mumbled:

"The Communist Party of the United States of America is a working class political party carrying forth today the traditions of Jefferson, Paine, Jackson and Lincoln, and of the Declaration of Independence . . . it is devoted to the defense of the immediate interests of the workers, farmers and all toilers against capitalist exploitation. . . .

"Now that doesn't sound so bad, does it? They're smart, them communists, putting in all that baloney, but listen to

this part. Here's where they come out and really say what they're for.

"By establishing a common ownership of the national economy, through a government of the people, by the people and for the people; the abolition of all exploitation of man by man, nation by nation, and race by race, and thereby the establishment of socialism, according to the scientific principles enunciated by the greatest teachers of mankind, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin——

"Didja get that? According to the greatest bums in history, if you ask me! If you," he turned to Lillian, "weren't here, I'd call them something," he snorted.

"Well, we'd better be going," sad Mel.

"D'ya want a copy of this constitution? I'll photograph it for you," said Smith.

"Won't it be too much trouble?" asked Mel.

Smith waved a hand at us. "Not at all, and I'll put my name on it so's people'll know where you got it. I like kids of your type. Glad to help you out."

"Sure," Buddy added and flipped a cigarette butt out the window.

Mel and Lillian departed with an autographed enlargement of the constitution of the Communist Party.

Meanwhile, George and Helen searched out Alexander Boynton in an old bank building, the offices of the "Recall Maverick" campaign. It was one of the banks that had folded in 1932. Big signs, RECALL MAVERICK, hung outside.

"Reporters, huh?" Hoarse and hoary, Alexander Boynton graciously held a chair for Helen to sit down and motioned George to another. He looked at Helen's innocent face. "All right, I guess you're not spies. But I want to make

sure you get everything I say, so you," he pointed to George, "you take down the statement I dictate."

George wrote down everything Mr. Boynton said.

"Hrrumph. Personally I take the position that we in the United States are building a house of democracy and those who wish to work on the house of communism or any other 'ism' should go where they are building that sort of structure. . . .

"Hrrumph. Second paragraph. It is said in the Bible that you cannot serve two masters, and it is equally true that you cannot serve two flags. I am not speaking for this organization when I say it is my belief that every man who believes in destroying our form of government by violence and bloodshed should be thrown into concentration camps and deported. . . .

"Hrrumph. Fifth paragraph. It is a well-known medical theory that diseases which cannot be cured should be localized. I would localize communism and anarchy in this country by strict surveillance over communistic activities until we could be rid of communism. . . .

"Hrrumph. Seventh paragraph. The blessings of liberty are for those who believe in liberty and should not be extended to the enemies of our free institutions. . . .

"Hrrumph. Eighth paragraph. . . . If we wait until their poisonous growth has become attached to our vitals, we will then be compelled to use surgery, and it may not be of the bloodless kind. . . ."

More hrrumphs and similar paragraphs.

George waved his arm limply as he and Helen left.

We found Emma Tenayuca Brooks near midnight in the Mexican section of town at the home address Potter had

given us. She answered the door herself, dressed in a tan skirt, white cotton blouse and ankle socks. We thought she was some neighbor's kid, and Helen in a motherly tone asked for Emma Tenayuca.

Her big black eyes laughed at us.

"I'm Emma Tenayuca," she said.

She led us into a barely furnished room. George and Joe hesitantly sat down on either side of her on the worn couch. She threw back her head and laughed as we stared at her. The thin dark face, black hair and shining white teeth stood out sharply, like a clear deep etching in the shabby room. Little Emma's whole thin body seemed to vibrate as she spoke, her mouth twisting slightly to the side as if she were making great effort to enunciate each syllable.

"Well," said Helen, "we'd like to hear your version of the riot. . . ."

She corroborated the facts Cliff Potter had given us.

She smiled. "That's nothing," she said. "Remember, there's a war in Europe now. We communists don't want to see the people of this country involved in it. But there are other people who profit and grow rich on war, and they'll try to squelch the communists. They won't stop at riots. They'll try every means to put us out of the way."

Her intense manner silenced us, and she continued. "These people who profit from wars—the big bankers and manufacturers—won't admit their real reason for trying to get us involved. But we will never stop telling the people that the men who want war want to make money out of it."

"But what's the war got to do with an anti-communist riot?" asked George.

"Because," Emma replied directly, "the same people who want to get us into war are trying to divide and weaken the

workers in this state. And communists stand for the strength and unity of working people all over."

Lighting a cigarette, she continued. "You have to understand Texas in order to see the whole picture. We're a ranching state, an oil and cotton and pecan state. The owners want to hire labor at lowest possible wages here, in the cotton fields and pecan factories. So the big capitalists hire Mexicans, pay them lower wages than Americans, divide the two groups against each other—and rule both.

"But don't think the West rules Texas. The big Eastern banks own the oil wells and sulphur fields—and profits go back to Wall Street. Yes, Wall Street controls the state legislature.

"You ought to see some of the ranches we have out here. The King Ranch has 800,000 acres. People are born and buried there without setting foot outside. Census takers are never allowed on, and labor organizers who go in never come out."

She laughed again at our worried looks. "But things are changing even here," she said. "In Fort Worth, since the organizational drive started among the stockyards workers, the whole progressive movement has been given new impetus. There's a pretty strong old-age-pension movement now, 'Nickel for Grandma' it's called. It provides for a nickel tax on every barrel of oil.

"Governor O'Daniel's main appeal in getting himself elected was the thirty-dollars-a-month old-age-pension program. After he got into office, he proposed that the pensions be financed by a 'transactions tax. He insists that is different from a sales tax, but it provides for a tax on every sale or transaction. All the progressives have banded together behind the 'Nickel for Grandma' pension plan. Instead of taxing the poor, to finance the pensions, it would tax the rich

oil companies by making them pay five cents on every barrel of crude oil they purchase.

"Do you know what the poll tax is?" she continued. "Yes, you have to pay money in order to vote down here. So the poor can't vote. That's why Congressman Martin Dies gets himself elected with 12,000 votes out of 361,000 people in his district.

"Do you know what the secret ballot is? Well, we don't have the secret ballot in Texas. Those workers who are able to pay the poll tax must risk losing their jobs when they vote for candidates whom their bosses oppose."

Her dark eyes flashed angrily, then smiled.

"But it won't last forever. They can start riots against us and malign us in every way through the powerful channels of press and radio. But they can't keep us down. The people are organizing, farmers as well as workers, and they can't keep the people down forever."

6

Texas feels Mexico.

Juan Carlos Hidalgo, a school teacher returning to his country from the convention of the American Federation of Teachers, told us something about Mexico. "I am a member of the Syndicate of Educational Workers," he said. "We have a real union, and the teachers are very much aware of the struggle between the people of our country and all the imperialists who try to control us."

We met him in a little Mexican restaurant where we had gone to sample real Mexican food. The chili and enchilladas tasted hot, heavy and soggy. Juan Carlos pounded his fist on the table and waved his arms as he explained what imperialism had done to Mexico and what Mexicans were doing to combat imperialism.

"This is how we teach arithmetic and geography," he said. "We give the little children a problem. 'German imperialism has invested \$13,000,000 in a certain industry, British imperialism has invested \$22,000,000 and America's Wall Street has invested \$60,000,000. How much have all the imperialists invested in this industry to control our country?' The pupils add these figures, and they learn very early what imperialism means."

Helen struggled to down a large crisp tortilla.

"Isn't that propaganda you're teaching?" she asked.

Juan Carlos watched her amateurish attempts to eat his country's favorite biscuit. He smiled amusedly before he replied.

"And what did you learn in your American schoolrooms? 'If Johnny earns a million dollars and gives half to his friend, how much does he have for himself?' That's the way you learned arithmetic? No?"

Helen gave up the tortilla with a despairing sigh. She nodded. "That's the way I learned arithmetic," said she.

"Then," Juan Carlos continued triumphantly, "we have a right to teach our pupils mathematics on a sound and realistic basis. We give them this problem: 'Your father works in a factory and makes 300 pesos worth of goods. The boss takes 250 pesos for himself. How much does your father get for his labor?' That's realistic, no? Then we teach geography, and we describe Abyssinia or Spain. 'These countries used to be free, but now they have been taken over by German, British and Italian imperialism.' That's how we teach the boys and girls of Mexico."

We walked over to the Hays Plaza, where the Chili Queens—Mexican women in colorful costumes—served large plates of chili and tamales, while men in flat black sombreros

and tight trousers strummed guitars and played request numbers.

The singing, strumming Mexicans grouped around us and smiled as they serenaded us. We looked across the plaza at the tall modernistic buildings.

After the Mexicans had finished their songs, they held out their sombreros for nickels and dimes from the crowd. George dropped a dime into a hat.

"*Gracias.*" They moved to another part of the Plaza and began to sing to some new arrivals.

San Antonio was as cosmopolitan as Seattle, but it had its earmarks. Panhandlers on the street sang *Home, Home on the Range* as visiting farmers and their families, all decked out in new or infrequently worn clothing, stood and stared. Baptist preachers held meetings on the street corners and told us our souls could still be saved. Uniforms were everywhere. Near-by Fort Houston, Kelly and Randolph air fields sent the soldiers into town for their fun. Department stores displayed latest styles in riding boots and harnesses. Otherwise, San Antonio looked like Seattle or Kansas City or Brooklyn's downtown section.

Helen strolled into Franklin's Beauty Parlor to see about a manicure. We were still awaiting word from our publisher, but after all, said Helen, she had to help find out about public opinion in San Antonio, and if we were going to be stranded, thirty cents wouldn't make much difference. So young Isobel Shell proceeded to give Helen the manicure plus an idea of public opinion in the city.

"I'm from New York," said Helen, "traveling around and writing a book."

"Oh," said young Isobel. "Oh, my! Wait, I'll call the girls over." The other girls gathered around Helen, deserting angry customers. She asked them about their work.

"We work on a commission basis here," said Isobel. "We average about fifteen dollars a week."

"There aren't many jobs around," added a small dark-haired girl in a soft drawl. "My boy friend has been unemployed since he graduated from high school, so we can't get married."

Another dark-haired girl called Marie absent-mindedly filed her own nails as she said slowly: "He's not the only one. In the meat packing houses the boys can earn about sixteen dollars a week, and that's about all the jobs there are."

"Sure," said Isobel. "That's why so many of them were in that riot a couple of weeks ago. They've got nothing else to do and they're mad. So they took it out on the communists."

"Hey!" called a plump customer from underneath a hair drier. "How long am I supposed to stay here while you chit-chat?"

The chit-chat ended. Isobel polished off Helen's nails with a final sweep of the brush.

"What do you think of the war in Europe?" asked Helen.

Young Isobel frowned. "You see all them soldiers in town here?"

Helen nodded.

"They're pretty pesky around here, true enough, but I wouldn't like to see them go off and get killed."

Helen met George outside and they went into air-cooled Joskins Department store.

At the sweater counter a tall thin woman wearing a small silver cross continued the talk about the war. She had worked part time for eleven years; at last the store had given her a permanent job a few months before. Her husband was sick and unemployed.

"They got no right," she said in a high-pitched voice, "to start this war business all over again. We had enough of it

twenty years ago. My husband is just the age they take for war."

San Antonio . . . like Seattle, Kansas City or Brooklyn.

Dick Jeffrey, lean and slow-speaking secretary to Maury Maverick, took us on a tour of the city.

We saw the Alamo.

"Old Sam Houston," mused Dick Jeffrey. "There's an old story told about him and Senator Sheppard. Both shouted 'Down with liquor' but they went about it in different ways."

We looked at Davy Crockett's powder can and shot pouch, at the moss from the oak on the San Jacinto battleground where Sam Houston lay wounded when Santa Ana surrendered his sword. We read the familiar—"Thermopylae had its messenger of death; the Alamo had none."

We had learned about the defense of the Alamo in our schoolrooms. About all we remembered was: "Remember the Alamo!"

We saw La Villita, restored by WPA workers. La Villita, the little town where old Ben Milan held out against the Mexicans. Across the plaza from City Hall we visited the Spanish Governor's palace, complete with wishing well and fountain, musty and still smelling of the old aristocracy. An original dagger tree in the garden still looked menacing, with its sharp and pointed leaves. The Keystone over the entrance bore the Hapsburg coat-of-arms and the date 1749.

Dick Jeffrey drove us out to the San José mission, built from stone. Soldiers and their families had lived there when the Spanish sought to stop the encroachment of the French. Its mill had been built in 1720 for grinding meal, and the stone used to grind corn was hundreds of years old.

Jeffrey took us to Fort Houston, shaped like a quadrangle,

inhabited by military men in a military way. A tame deer and peacocks on the lawn, together with swans in a pond, contrasted strangely with the prim uniform houses and barracks.

Randolph Field looked like a summer resort with its tile-roofed homes, large swimming pool and cool-looking lawns. Only the roaring bombers overhead and the large hangars reminded us that Randolph Field, like Kelly and Brooks and Fort Houston, were places of war.

We had four dollars left.

Mel sat dejectedly in a corner of our swank tourist house. "We can't move, because the car has to be fixed."

"Take it to the garage and fix it," said Lillian. "When the check comes, we can call for the car."

"I've got a headache," complained Joe.

"What we all need," said Helen, "is some relaxation. Let's go to a movie."

George looked coldly at her. "We've got four dollars left between us and New York."

"I've got a headache," said Joe.

We voted. Helen, Joe and George went to the movies. Mel took the car to a garage and joined them later. Lillian sat alone in the air-conditioned house and worried. Sitting cross-legged on the bed with a typewriter propped on her knees, she typed slowly and tore up what she had written. She washed socks and pajamas, returned to the typewriter and waited. The morning mail came—without the expected letter. The afternoon mail came . . . a letter for Joe.

The others returned.

"We saw Mara Alexander in *The Rains Came*," announced Helen.

"Yep," chuckled George, "she rushes into a room, picks up

the dog and rushes out after closing the door. What a part! What acting!"

"We walked back," said Mel, "the car's in the garage."

"The check, it didn't come, did it?"

"Not yet."

"Suppose . . ."

The tourist owner knocked on the door. "There's a special delivery letter here for you."

*Check:* "One hundred dollars and no cents."

*Letter:* "I said I would not let you down, and here is additional proof. . . ."

*George:* "This has to take us a long way. No more cigarettes."

*Helen:* "What understanding. Isn't he sweet?"

*Joe:* "What a dope I was to believe in Pirandello."

*Mel:* "Let's get the car out of the garage."

*Lillian:* "Now we've *got to finish* additional chapters."

We phoned Mrs. Maverick, who came down to our royal suite and cashed the check. We took the car out of the garage.

"Look at my letter," said Joe. "The boys at Brooklyn College have started a 'Bring Wershba Back' campaign. They're getting out petitions and buttons and collection cans. They promise to have some money for us by the time we reach New Orleans."

"And you were worrying!" Lillian scoffed.

7

It took a few hours for us to realize we were approaching the nation's South. Coming into Austin, we stopped near a railroad station. George stepped out to ask for information.

COLORED  
WAITING ROOM

WHITE  
WAITING ROOM

We had heard about Jim Crow in the South. But when the reality struck us full in the face, we were shocked and surprised at our shock. George entered the "White Waiting Room" and got the desired information from a drawling clerk who answered all questions politely.

Austin, capital of the Lone Star State, which had been under six flags, including that of an independent republic.

Cliff Potter had given us the name of a newspaper man—Ray Neuman. "There's not a single Republican here," Neuman told us as we sat in the legislative chamber, deserted except for some bony farmers squirming uncomfortably in new suits and their families staring at the pictures of the men who had served Texas.

Neuman told us about the flour-salesman Governor, Lee ("Pass the Biscuits, Pappy") O'Daniel. The homey kind, O'Daniel boasted that he had never voted before he ran for Governor on a program that promised to kick the professional politicians out of Austin and to industrialize Texas. He still continued his radio program complete with prayers, every Sunday, but his political program remained on paper.

"Lil' Horace," one of his singin' cowboys, greeted us in the Governor's office. He was now the Governor's secretary. The Governor was not in town, said Lil' Horace.

We parked our car amid the forest of cars on the University of Texas campus and wandered about the huge grounds until we found the journalism city room.

Christine Adams, young and amiable reporter on the *Daily Texan*, campus newspaper, and husky Ben Kaplan,

radio editor, told us about the University. There were 11,000 students at the school, and they had a good football team.

A large, plump boy in one of the college eateries advised us to look up Joe Belden, Director of the Bureau of Student Opinion at the University. Belden, a slight, sharp-faced graduate with straight black hair and neat dark suit told us about Student Opinion Surveys of America, a sort of miniature student Gallup poll, which he mailed to college newspapers all over the country.

"The student opinion surveys," he declared quietly, "serve the campus as the American Institute of Public Opinion serves the nation."

What had the Bureau found? Belden showed us one of the clippings on a poll taken on the candidacy of John Nance Garner for President. "GARNER NOT FOR US, DECLARE U. T. STUDENTS; GIVE US MORE NEW DEAL. Student Opinion Bureau Survey Shows Campus Plurality Thinks Texas' Native Son Too Conservative, Too Old."

The question asked by bureau interviewers was worded: "Do you favor Vice-President Garner or a liberal New Deal candidate for President in 1940?"

The campus at the University of Texas answered:

Garner	34.0%
Liberal New Dealer	49.8%
No opinion	16.2%

A later poll was taken on the question: "Would you like to have Roosevelt elected for a third term?"

The students said:

No third term	58.8%
Third term desirable	36.7%
No opinion	4.5%

Belden showed us replies on some of the national polls taken during the past year.

Should sex education courses in colleges be made compulsory? *Yes*—61.9 per cent.

If you had to make a choice, which would you prefer, fascism or communism? *Communism*—56.4 per cent.

Do you think college students drink too much? *No*—65.2 per cent.

Do you believe a blood test before marriage to detect venereal disease should be required by law? *Yes*—93.1 per cent.

If the United States went to war for other reasons than the defense of the country, would you volunteer? *No*—80.3 per cent.

We would have voted with the majority on all these questions.

We stopped at the NYA office and found Helen Fuller, who was working in Texas now. She called in the newspaper boys, who asked us what we thought of Texas. Next day we read our answers.

"Down at Uvalde," said the story in the Austin *American*, "they tried to find out who John Garner's neighbors think will continue the New Deal. Joe, the youngest, who does most of the talking if given the chance, reported the Uvalde citizens were surprisingly languid in their answer to questions about Cactus Jack."

Then the cheery NYA official took us to dinner. Over large plates of fried chicken, she advised us to stop and see the NYA project at Prairie View State College, on our way down to Houston.

We saw Prairie View—a project for Negro youth. In a large white house surrounded by green lawns we found the "oldest NYA project in existence," according to Mrs. Onnie L. Colter, its motherly supervisor.

"Our girls stay here for six months, following the course of domestic training. They are paid twenty-six dollars a month, out of which fourteen dollars goes for maintenance, food, laundry and lights. After a girl leaves, we try to find work for her. Most of the girls are placed in domestic service. They receive seven dollars a week plus maintenance. Formerly, they were paid no higher than three dollars."

Mrs. Colter stood as she spoke with us. We waited for her to sit down. Later we learned that the South teaches Negroes to act "respectful" in front of white people. They do not sit down together in the same room.

Some of the girls, the supervisor informed us, enroll in college courses for which they receive full credit toward a degree. There is no attempt to separate the regular students from the workers on the NYA projects.

Mary Ellen Jackson, President of the Co-operative Club, had come to the project after two years of college. She couldn't find a job.

"You'd be surprised," she told us, "to see how some of these kids are when they first come here. They think the whole world is against them. Sometimes they haven't had a decent meal in months. But they learn how to live together and work together, and how they do change!"

Projects on the college campus included a hospital, laundry and college kitchen. Students worked here to pay their way through college, and resident workers were trained in nursing, laundering and cooking.

Mrs. Colter suggested we go to see the College Dean of Women and Dean of Men to get a picture of the whole project. Joe, Mel and George went over to one of the large buildings and the girls to another.

R. W. Hilliard, young Dean of Men, told the boys it cost twenty-five dollars a semester, including room and board, to

come to Prairie View State College. About a thousand students attended.

Dean Hilliard laughed good-naturedly when Joe asked if the college admitted any white students.

"This is the South," said Dean Hilliard. "The South doesn't want to mix black and white youth. But the South is waking up. Ninety per cent of the students here are becoming teachers. They will help in the awakening. But ministers can do even more, to show the Negro that his problem is not only social but economic. Most of the students come here at a great sacrifice. They come from share-cropping families or town slums. There's the story of a father who took his boy, a senior, out of school because the boss on the farm told the family they'd be thrown off the land if the boy didn't come back to help farm."

The Dean of Women gave Helen and Lillian a brighter picture. "Educational opportunities in Texas," she said, "are not as bad as other places in the South."

She called over a short thin girl in a bright red blouse who took us on a tour of the campus. She showed us the nursery, beauty parlor and laundry where the students worked to help pay their tuition. The laundry was clean and cool. The young students ironed or dumped basketfuls of soiled clothing into washing machines.

They were learning to work and feel useful.

8

Houston—the world's largest cotton port.

NAMES . . .

Malcolm Cotton Dobbs

Hotel Cotton

Houston, Texas

League of Young Southerners

We walked into the Hotel Cotton and found Malcolm, better known as "Tex." He was young, with a firm chin and black smiling eyes. His grandmother owned the hotel, and we occupied the family suite on the top floor during our stay in Houston.

"You can all take baths," said Tex, "and, meanwhile, I'll invite some young people over. And tonight we'll go to a YWCA dance."

We took much needed baths and put on our best and cleanest clothes. We were ready for the youth of Houston. We filed into the living room and Tex surveyed us with admiration. Two young fellows stood up from the couch and shook hands.

"Jim Gaither and Jim Anderson," said Tex.

Slightly built and unassuming, Jim Anderson had been clerking in a bank after his graduation from the University of Texas. One day he met Tex Dobbs casually. Jim quit his job to work with the League of Young Southerners.

Jim Gaither, wiry and bespectacled, had attended theological school in the East. Now he worked with a road gang on week days, preached on Sundays and worked for the League of Young Southerners in his spare time.

And Tex Dobbs, the executive secretary of the League of Young Southerners, had just received a Bachelor of Divinity degree from St. Lawrence University after studying for a year at Union Theological Seminary. He claimed he was "broadening his vision" by working for the Young Southerners.

"A young fellow doesn't know enough about life to start advising others how to live," he said, his dark eyes sparkling. "At least I don't. A little more work with young people in the South will make me a better preacher."

"And what is the League of Young Southerners?" asked George.

We sipped Coca-Colas, the ever-present Southern drink, and watched Tex, liking him because we felt he liked us. He draped one leg over the side of his armchair and began to talk.

"We're a membership and co-ordinating body for youth organizations in the South. We Southerners think our democracy is a good thing, and we want to insure its continuation and growth by promoting better citizenship among our young people and stimulating a greater interest in the problems we Southerners must solve."

"Yes, but what do you do?"

"Well, things move slowly down here," he drawled. "But we're beginning to hold youth forums and conferences. We've done something toward initiating youth fact-finding commissions to *know your community* and citizenship ceremonies for all young people in a community who have come of age." He fumbled in his pockets and drew out a narrow brochure.

"This is our program." He began to read. "Support of the NYA, endorsement of a Federal Youth Service Administration combining the programs of CCC and NYA under civilian control, work for increased appropriations to meet the needs of students and unemployed youth, work for long-term loans at low rates of interest to farm youth."

Tex folded the brochure and put it back in his pocket. "We're guided in our program," he continued, "by the thoughts and ideas of young people throughout the South. And what they demand we are trying to provide."

"Whew!"

Tex laughed. "You don't know how important some-

thing like the Young Southerners is until you really get to understand the South."

That night we started out for a dance given by the Celita Linda Club, a group of Mexican girls who belonged to the YWCA. We had not danced since the rounds and squares with the migratory workers. In high spirits we shagged after Tex as he strolled along the street to the YWCA building.

Small, dark Mexican girls led us to the starlit and lamplit roof garden. Plump, poker-faced mothers holding babies watched their daughters carefully as they went through various stages of the shag, the big apple and trucking. The Mexican mothers did not once change their stolid expression, but the young daughters laughed and danced eagerly.

We soon fell into step with them.

Pretty little Mary Lou Gonzales led George into the kitchen for a drink of water. A small group of the Mexican girls were there. They told George they worked in a factory making gunnysacks for cotton picking. They told him about their strike a year ago. The factory owner, a Jew, had imported Negroes to work as scabs during the strike and had hired thugs to beat up the strikers.

"But Negroes and Jews are discriminated against too," said Mary Lou. "The owners try to make the Mexicans hate the Negroes and the Negroes to hate us. But if we could work together we would gain much more."

George returned to the dance floor with Mary Lou. Until midnight and the strains of *Auld Lang Syne*, we danced and talked and had a good time. The Mexican mothers collected their daughters and went home.

Tex and Jim Anderson left for Nashville, Tennessee, and we promised to meet them there. That day we went down to Galveston, lay on the beach and swam in the warm waters

of the Gulf of Mexico. We rode the roller coaster and looped the loop until we felt all mixed up inside.

War talk was everywhere. The talk came to life in the persons of the soldiers from near-by forts. Around Fort Crockett in Galveston, we saw a sign:

DOWN WITH HITLER, MUSSOLINI AND THE  
GALVESTON SCHOOL BOARD!!

## *Chapter 9* "THE SOUTH, SUH . . ."

🌻 "Elevation—10 feet."

We tried to remember our exultation after we had climbed 12,000 feet over Loveland Pass in the Rocky Mountains. We could not remember. We could feel only the depressing low-land heat, the murky still air and the unhealthy dampness of Texas on the Gulf Coast.

The prairie land had become swamps and rice fields. We passed a skinny brown cow grazing knee deep amid the marshes. We sped toward Louisiana, a new state, where we might find breathing easier, where we might throw off sullen and despondent tempers. We felt gloom in this land, and it was like some contagious disease affecting all of us and making us mean in mood.

An old Ford bounced along in front of us. When we approached a road gang of Negroes and whites swinging picks into the earth, we saw several pairs of hands throw out some white papers from the old Ford. We looked back and

saw a tall brawny Negro pause, wipe his face with his sleeve, look at one of the white papers and toss it away.

A curve in the road blotted out the road gang, and we turned around. Mel drew up alongside the jalopy. Six elderly women wearing black hats and black dresses threw the pamphlets at us.

"Hallelujah!" one called as we passed them.

The Free Tract Society published the pamphlets, and the distributing black ladies seemed to be the South End Gospel Society of Beaumont.

We read the tracts on "conversion" and "salvation," and a piece about war reprinted from *The Revealer* edited by Gerald B. Winrod of Wichita, Kansas. Back in the Midwest we had heard about Winrod.

We began to feel uneasy about the South. Like many Northerners, we had a preconceived picture of this part of our country. The South End Gospel Society surprised us. The depressing atmosphere caught us off guard. The land did not fit the picture in our minds. Where was the vast stretch of cotton land with the colorful plantation mansions?

The Louisiana state line brought no change, and we stayed sullen. We bumped over the ruts and cracks in the highway—Huey Long's contributions to his people.

Weeping willows turning brown in the autumn sun hung over water ditches on either side of the road. We passed long fields of rice and little shack towns built for the Louisiana State Rice Milling Company.

Roadside billboards invited us to visit lottery clubs, to match our skill at pinochle with the experts, to stop for the night at "Billie's Best Boarding House." Rows of weather-beaten signs informed us "Bets of All Kinds Accepted," and "Direct Wires to All Tracks." Every half-mile "Hostesses" at roadhouses lay in wait.

We twisted through the swamp land, cutting into droves of giant mosquitoes and miscellaneous bugs. The insects covered the windows and body of the car, shutting out the swamps from our sight.

The blue waters of Lake Charles appeared like a mirage. Clean white homes and neat lawns on the lakefront didn't seem to belong here, on the edge of the huge swamp. We crossed the bridge, staring incredulously as freshly painted river boats drifted by. We might have been on one of Lillian Bond's moving picture sets of the old South.

An open truck laden with bales of cotton preceded us as we left the colorful set behind and headed again into reality. Fuzzy bits of white protruded from the sides of the truck. Cotton . . . at last, the real South . . .

Near Lafayette, we stopped to fix a flat tire. Helen wandered down a side road about half a mile, returning in time to see Mel jacking down the car. Breathing heavily, as if she had been running, she looked quickly at each of us.

"I saw a plantation," she gasped. "I've never seen anything like it—a big white house for the landowner, and behind it rows of shacks for the Negroes." She spoke haltingly, her eyes wide and unsmiling. "One room, no doors or windows, walls plastered with funny papers. Imagine! Dick Tracy and Terry and the Pirates being used to keep out the rain and wind. It was awful."

"Didn't the people try to chase you away?" asked Joe.

"No, they just stared at me. I tried to talk to them but they wouldn't answer. One house had eight little Negro kids, dressed in rags, thin and emaciated. A pregnant woman looked at me with eyes I'll never forget. It was awful," she repeated.

It was awful then, but we were to see miles of these houses, of people such as these. In California, we had seen

people living in filth and disease. But to our minds, that was "temporary housing." Migrants picked up and moved. The people in these plantation shacks lived there permanently, all year around. A one-room house for a large family, too many sick, naked children, funny papers on the walls, faces full of misery and terror, a mattress on the floor for father, mother and six kids.

A plump, jovial and loud-spoken garage owner named Long patched our tire in Lafayette. Huey Long, framed in red, white and blue, hung over the doorway.

"Related?" Mel asked jerking a thumb at the picture of the deceased "Kingfish."

"Naw," the garage owner yelled above his own pounding of the tire rim, "but his picture stays as long as I stay!"

"Was he popular out here?"

"Popular? I'll say," returned the minor Long. "People around here still think of Huey as God. He was the common folks' man, not like the crooks we got now!"

"Crooks?"

Round Mr. Long roared into a laugh. Then he looked at us slyly.

"It's like this. Huey would take a nickel in graft and give us back a dime. And he'd tell us about that nickel. Those crooks in there now take the whole fifteen cents, and they don't tell us a damn thing."

He charged us twenty-two cents for the same gasoline we had purchased in Texas for thirteen cents.

"Eight-cent tax," said he. "That's sharing the wealth." He put his hands on his hips and laughed loudly.

Modern store fronts lined Lafayette's Main Street. We drove quickly through the Negro quarter with its dilapidated wooden huts. Barefoot schoolchildren filled the streets, on their way home for lunch. On the outskirts of

town we stopped for our own lunch. George admired our tasty twenty-five cent "fresh vegetable" plates until the waitress said, "They're all canned, buddy."

Sugar fields replaced rice on our way to New Orleans. As far as we could see ahead, stalks of cane ten feet high stood in closely planted rows. The "caners" swung their flat machetes, cutting the stalks about a foot off the ground and tossing them into waiting trucks. Both men wearing straw hats and women with Quaker bonnets to keep off the sun worked in the fields, and once we saw a young boy, his machete gleaming in the sun, keeping pace with the older workers.

Groups of brick buildings along the way taught us how the sugar cane was processed. A large notice—"Delgado Albanio Plantation"—warned us to "keep off." The land took on a pattern—fields of sugar cane, huge tanks and vats, syrup compressors, distilling and drying and bleaching plants. Large tank cars, waiting to carry the sugar all over the country, ended the pattern until the next large sugar field.

Old towns with narrow streets and worm-eaten houses continually broke the pattern. As we neared the "Largest City in the South," we stopped in one of the old towns to buy cigarettes. Joe entered a large general store.

The white clerk scowled at him. "You can't get served here, bud. This store's for niggers'!"

Joe backed out of the store and bumped into an old Negro woman in a broad yellow hat and long black skirt. A corn cob pipe hung from the side of her mouth.

"Excuse me, lady," said Joe.

The old lady took the pipe out of her mouth and stared after him. White men don't apologize to Negroes down South, nor do they refer to colored women as "ladies."

Pinheads of light lay across the river as we crossed the Long-Allen Bridge into New Orleans. A heavy mist obscured the water below, but the whistles and hoots of the boats told us we had crossed the Mississippi River for the second time.

We were wet; our clothes were soaked with perspiration. Now the humidity, the gloom and discomfort of our day's trek from one part of the Gulf Coast to another seemed to become concentrated in New Orleans. We could not brush the large black mosquitoes off our arms and legs; we had to pick them off. We later found out they were *Anopheles* mosquitoes, carriers of malaria. The biggest Coca-Cola sign we had ever seen greeted us as we made for Canal Street, the main thoroughfare in the city. Wide as an average block is long, the street stood in strange contrast to all the other narrow, crooked side streets. Trains ran through the center of the city. We saw more noisy grimy freight trains here than in all the Rocky Mountain states. Their smoke sifted through the humid air as if to choke and stifle life itself.

The white-clad inhabitants took all this calmly. We could see their coats and dresses clinging stickily to their skins, but they didn't seem to mind. We did. Mel swore under his breath as he tried to park our car on one of the narrow side streets. The rest of us grumbled because he took so long.

NAMES . . .

Ruth Parker

Book Store—122 Chartres Street

It took us half an hour to find the place. We walked down the dirty cobblestone streets. Bars and saloons lined the blocks and took up almost every corner. Street guides in official white caps clutched at our arms, offering to show us

the town's high spots, where "beer costs a jit and you can get good women cheap."

Ruth Parker's store was dark and still.

Mel whistled and walked closer to the store window. "Look at that!" He pointed to a round hole the size of a penny, drilled through the glass.

"It's a bullet hole!" said Mel.

We made a bee-line for our car and started to search for tourist cabins. The sign outside the first "motel" said "Rooms—\$1." The manager looked into our car, saw Helen and Lillian. He shook his head, showing two front gold teeth in an oily smile.

"You don't want to stay here tonight," he said. "You've already got a mixed crowd."

We found another camp.

"And I thought housing was cheap in the South," moaned Helen when George plunked down four silver dollars, souvenirs of the West, for the two-room cabin.

The short, bald-headed camp manager explained the reason for the high rates.

"The owner of the largest hotel in town is Seymour Weiss, one of Huey's politicians. He forces us to charge high prices for these cabins, so we won't compete with the hotel." The manager paused and spat tobacco juice into a white spittoon. "But he'll get his," he continued. "He's going to spend some time in a government institution, and it won't be a hotel!" (On January 6, 1940, Seymour Weiss was convicted by a federal grand jury.)

Next morning, we again started out to find Ruth Parker. Newsboys on every corner shouted headlines about federal indictments of Louisiana politicians. We began to learn about machine politics in the state. When Huey Long had been killed, the national Democratic machine began to buy

back the votes. Result—"The Second Louisiana Purchase."

On everything we bought, from lunches to shirts, we had to pay a "luxury tax." The taxes and federal relief funds were used to build up machine politics. We began to hear the names of Maestri, Weiss and Leche coupled with complaints from the people we met.

The store on Chartres Street was open. Ruth Parker, young and quiet-mannered, with deep brown eyes and hair, solemnly told us about that bullet hole.

"You see," she explained softly, "New Orleans is one of the biggest shipping ports in the country. The National Maritime Union is one of the strongest unions here. Most of the members of the old International Seamen's Union—that's an A. F. of L. outfit—switched to the NMU and threw out the ISU thugs. Well, those thugs know the NMU boys buy books at our place. They've shot at us and tried to bomb the store. Now the landlord is making us move, because he thinks his place will be blown to pieces."

A tall slim man in a neatly pressed suit entered the store. "Here's one of the NMU boys now," said Ruth. "I'll get him to tell you the whole story."

He was introduced to us as Tim. He sat on the edge of Ruth's desk, rubbing his right leg with the palm of his hand. "These clothes make me feel uncomfortable," he said. "I'd like to be back in my old dungarees."

"Isn't there any work?" asked George.

"Well, the war in Europe has beached a lot of the guys. They say it's only temporary. In the meantime, we walk around with nothing to do."

"I was just telling them," said Ruth, "about the little warning we got from our ISU friends." She motioned toward the window pane.

Tim grunted. "Those goons," he said, and told us the

story of the A. F. of L. in New Orleans. Their Central Trades Council had elected Mayor Bob Maestri as an honorary member. According to Tim's story, Maestri never hesitated to call out the troops or police to break a strike, but he never moved a finger to investigate the murders of union organizers.

"Murders?"

Tim told us about Phil Carey, secretary of the NMU in New Orleans, who had been murdered two weeks before. The young labor leader had been sitting with some friends in his car parked on one of the city's main streets. Three ISU thugs came over, dragged Carey from the car and threw him to the ground. A crowd gathered, but one of the thugs held them off with a gun while the other two beat Carey with chains. Then they shot him dead.

"For a whole week," said Tim quietly, "the police didn't do a thing to find the murderers, although their pictures were identified by at least ten persons. One of the ISU officials was positively identified, but he skipped town. So nothing's being done about Phil's death."

2

We wandered down to the end of Canal Street and watched the Mississippi River move slowly by. A seaman sat on a post near the waterfront.

"Thas ri'," he said, in a slow almost incoherent drawl. "Ah'm beached by the wah."

"What are you going to do?"

"Dunno. The gov'nment ought to do somethin' to take care of us. We can't go 'round like this for the whole wah."

We wanted to go down to the docks, but the war had created a new system; we needed official passes. The ship-pers couldn't afford to take chances.

"Times is pretty bad down here," the seaman continued. "The cops pick us up on any old excuse—'vagrancy charges,' mostly because we're NMU. They have a lot of work to do around the prisons and city buildings. So they get their work done free. Boy, I wish that darn wah would end!"

We saw more signs of war in the city. On the main street corners army recruiting stations had been set up.

One day, while the others were interviewing social workers and union leaders, George went shopping for some clothes. He didn't have anything left to wear. His last pair of socks had stiffened, Joe had "borrowed" his last shirt.

"Hey, bud! How about joinin' the reg'lar guys?"

George was startled out of his reverie on socks, shirts and shorts and looked at the young soldier smiling at him from the recruiting station.

"Good grub, clean beds, healthful exercise and twenty-one dollars a month to start," said the army man. "Better'n walkin' the streets hungry. . . ."

"Why?" asked George.

"Become a man! Defend your country!"

"I'm a man already," replied George. "And I thought we already had an army to defend our country."

"Listen, buddy," said the young soldier, "the war over in Europe is sure to spread to our shores unless we get a bigger army."

"Why did you join up?" George asked quizzically.

The soldier stopped waving his arms, and his face relaxed. "Why not?" he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "My dad's a cropper near Clarksburg. There were nine other kids in the family. I run away. No use gettin' into a rut on twenty acres."

"But why did you join the army?"

"Oh, I'd bummed all over the South, workin' when I

could find somethin' to do. But the cards were stacked against me. It's like I say—I got three meals a day and money in my pockets. C'mon, join up! Don't be a sap and go hungry. It ain't worth it."

George shook his head and continued to a large department store. He bought a blazing red flannel shirt, socks and underwear. That shirt was something!

"Flannel?" Helen inquired when George showed it to her. "Flannel in this weather?"

"Sure," George answered. "Don't you know flannel absorbs the perspiration?"

Mel tried on George's new pair of socks.

"I want a flannel shirt too," said Joe.

So George and Joe went shopping.

". . . if Hitlerism and communism ain't wiped off the face of the earth, the damn niggers will take over this country . . ."

George and Joe stopped to listen to the street corner speaker who looked like the moving picture version of a Southern Colonel.

"Then think of our women and children," continued the Colonel. "We'll lose all our colonies and the red Bolsheviki will run the earth. We're God-fearing people down here, and it's high time we got into that fight and wiped Hitlerism and communism off the face of the earth."

That brought George and Joe back to the point the Colonel had started from. They entered the large department store and bought Joe a blazing purple flannel shirt.

On their way back they decided to ask people about the war. Did the young soldier and the Colonel represent public opinion in New Orleans?

"No," said a sixteen-year-old newsboy, "it's like those gang wars you read about in the magazines. Both sides fighting

over the loot. I've got a big brother, and he don't want to go to any old war in Europe."

"No," said an unemployed Italian carpenter, "there's plenty to fight about in this country. They ought to build houses for people. I don't have no work, people need houses . . . we got plenty to do here."

"No," said a social worker, "we've got sick people in this country. We need money to cure pellagra and other poverty diseases in the South. We've got plenty to do in our own back yard without becoming involved in some European war."

Feeling much better, Joe and George decked themselves out in the purple and red shirts.

In the meantime, Mel and Helen timidly approached a narrow hallway leading to the NMU office, at the address Tim had given us.

Mel halted. "You'd better not go up with me," he said uneasily. "I don't see any other women around."

Helen laughed. "That's silly. I used to work for a ship maintenance workers' union. Come on." She preceded him upstairs to a smoke-filled hall crowded with both white and colored men. Helen and Mel walked into the hubbub of talk and activity. A perspiring red-faced man advised them to find a Mrs. Duffy, wife of the NMU organizer, and gave them her address.

In a newly remodeled house in the old French quarter, they found Mrs. Duffy, a trim and efficient little woman. Her apartment smelled of paint and varnish. The window shades were pulled down to keep out the sun and heat. A small cove in the wall held a large cot.

The organizer's wife sat at her desk with Helen and Mel on either side. Letters and papers were piled high before her. "I'm doing the union's office work here for the pres-

ent," she said. "But we're going to move into new headquarters soon."

She sorted the letters rapidly as she talked. "We have the backing of every man that sets foot on the waterfront," she explained. "The shipowners try to force the men to join the International Seamen's Union. One of our men who refused to pay dues to the ISU had his eye taken out with a bale hook."

The phone rang, she answered, excused herself and made two calls. Then she continued exactly where she had left off.

"But things are changing rapidly," she said. "Last summer I couldn't come home without finding detectives waiting for me. Now we're the ones who are making demands in spite of all the force and violence and murders they bring down upon us. At the moment, with the war in Europe, we're trying to get \$25,000 insurance for each man going into the war zones. We've just won a 25 per cent wage increase for them."

"How do they feel about the war?"

She tapped the letter opener on the desk. "Seamen are for strict neutrality. Ask any of them, they'll tell you."

As Mel and Helen were leaving, she called: "Don't be pessimistic about the South. Wherever you find labor strong and organized, you'll find hope for real democracy."

Young Gordon McIntyre, Director of the Farmers Educational and Co-operative Union, and his secretary, Peggy Dallet, took Joe up to union headquarters.

On the way, Gordon explained that the union tried to organize the small farmer and agricultural worker against the big plantation-owning companies. They got the small farmers to buy and sell through co-operatives and the agricultural workers to organize for higher wages in sugar and

cotton fields. When they arrived at the union, a middle-aged priest with a soft ruddy face and close-cropped white hair greeted them.

"Father Coulombe," said Gordon, "this is Joe Wershba, from New York, who's writing a book about America."

The Father had been chewing on a cigar. He took it out of his mouth and shook hands with Joe.

"I need a boy who can write and take shorthand," he said, speaking with a gentle French accent. "I need someone who can take down testimony in court. They're always misrepresenting and misquoting me."

"In court?" Joe looked surprised.

Gordon smiled. "Father Coulombe is one of our best union organizers," he said, and proceeded to explain that the priest had a parish in Bayou La Fourche in the city of Thibodaux, southwest of New Orleans.

"If I am to be a true priest," began Father Coulombe, "I must help my people materially as well as spiritually. In the Bayou area, the people need better wages in order to live as people should. But the big sugar companies are stubborn and selfish. I couldn't help but side with the workers in their struggle for a better existence on this earth. There were 215 families in my parish, and 56 per cent of them couldn't read. Children couldn't get adequate schooling, with 70 per cent of the white and 90 per cent of the Negro children too poor to attend school. We couldn't get enough money for the school, so there was one short term from January to May in a school that had only one room and two teachers."

"What did the children do the rest of the time?" asked Joe.

The priest looked significantly at Gordon and laughed shortly. "They worked in the fields. They worked in the sugar cane fields and in the shrimp factories."

Gordon continued to tell the priest's story. Father Coulombe and his parishioners began to put up a fight. They got the government to hold a wage hearing for the workers in the area, and wages were increased, child labor forbidden. But the big landowners grew wrathful. They brought pressure to bear on the hierarchy of the Church.

"I was demoted by the Church three times," the priest remarked, and shrugged his shoulders. "But I'm not going to stop working with my children." He reached for his broad-brimmed black felt hat. "I could use a young man to take shorthand notes on all my speeches." He looked at Joe.

"Maybe I'll study shorthand and come back here," said Joe.

"I'll wait for you," said Father Coulombe.

The area surrounding New Orleans was different from any other in the whole country. As in La Fourche parish, where Father Coulombe watched over his "children," there were parishes where the inhabitants retained all their seventeenth-century customs. The Cajuns and Creoles still dressed and talked like the original Spanish and French settlers.

3

". . . those damn niggers . . ."

We had the name of a young Negro boy, chairman of the New Orleans section of the Southern Negro Youth Congress. At eleven o'clock at night we drove to Ray Tillman's home in the Negro quarter of New Orleans. The streets were dark and unpaved. We parked the car and looked for the house number by lighting matches. A slightly built Negro lad dressed in pajamas answered our timid ring at his door.

"Yes, I'm Ray Tillman," he said.

When we told him why we had come, he expressed doubt

about the girls coming up to his house. White girls don't visit Negroes at night. He offered to come down to our car to talk. But his aunt objected. She wouldn't let Ray go downstairs with strangers. Too many things happened to Negroes in the dead of night. Her home was good enough for anybody, white or black. If all homes were like that, she told us, the world would have less misery.

We all came upstairs to the simple clean apartment. Ray put on some clothes and we all sat about the round table in the kitchen. Across from us, a china closet held a worn set of dishes and a small vase filled with violets.

Ray told us about Negro youth in the South. "It's twice as hard for the Negro young person today," he said quietly. "Not only is he a part of the four or five million unemployed youth, but he's discriminated against because of his race. The Negro pays high rents but is compelled to live in the worst slums. He has the hardest time to get a little education. He can't vote. You see," he continued seriously, "we don't look at our problem as different or apart from the problem of white youth or poor white folks. Our problem is essentially the same. But there are people who pit white against black deliberately. For instance, if the white worker in a large factory goes on strike, the owner hires Negroes to scab on the whites. This makes the antagonism sharper. But that picture is changing today. The white youth are beginning to realize that their problems of getting jobs cannot be separated from those of Negro youth. That's why you see the Southern Negro Youth Congress working so closely with groups like the YWCA and YMCA and the American Youth Congress."

Ray drew a long breath and waited for more questions.

"What does the Southern Negro Youth Congress work for concretely?" inquired Lillian.

"We want equal educational opportunities and equal job opportunities. We want the right to vote. We can't say that America has real democracy when only 10,000 out of 11,000,000 Negroes can vote in the South. Legally, I guess we have the right to vote," he declared. "Practically, we don't. When a Negro goes to the polls to register, he is asked to fill out an application form. When registration has been closed, he is told he hasn't filled out the form correctly. In other states, Georgia for instance, the Negro has to pay a cumulative poll tax. In order to vote, that means he has to pay the tax for every year since he reached the age of twenty-one. And then the Ku Klux Klan is beginning to ride again in the South, stopping those few Negroes who attempt to go to the polls.

"Along the lakefront," continued Ray, "the Negroes have a Jim Crow beach, Seabrook, next to the white beach. When the WPA improved the Negro beach, property values went up in the neighborhood. So some of the politicians moved the Negro beach into the most alligator-infested area of the lake. We protested so strongly they had to give Seabrook back to us."

When we left Ray, at three o'clock in the morning, we had nothing to say to each other about what he had told us. He had spoken quietly and sincerely about his problems. The case he presented seemed clear to us, and nothing we might say could add to or detract from it.

We really saw the color line in New Orleans. Up to this point we had seen it faintly and occasionally. Now we saw it drawn boldly in every restaurant, trolley car and theater, in housing, work and food. And it still shocked us, because in spite of everything we had heard in New York and everything we had seen in the South, we still thought of

our country's history and its famous documents . . . "people born free and equal."

We walked over to Dillard University for Negroes. Handsome white buildings were set back on wide green lawns. The Rosenwald Foundation, the Methodist Church and the General Education Board supported the school for Negro boys and girls. We stopped some young students on the campus and talked with them.

Young Franklin, nineteen years old and a junior at Dillard, wanted to be an actor.

"Honest," he said, "I played in an opera once." He told us a story about that opera. When Lawrence Tibbett had come to New Orleans to play *Aïda*, a number of Negro boys from Dillard were hired for the cast in the slave dance. After the opera, the boys had asked Tibbett to speak to them about music. The famous baritone invited them all to his dressing room and talked with them for a long time.

"Boy! Were those whites surprised!" young Franklin chuckled. "They're still talking about it to this very day."

A light-skinned, slim, seventeen-year-old boy wanted to be a preacher. His father was a tenant on a large plantation, and he had been sent to school on a scholarship. He told us about religion.

"I think the trouble with religion is that it cares too much for the less important moral virtues of man and ignores the more important virtues of economic and social problems. I don't think a man can be a good Christian without helping the well-being of his people."

"Then why do you want to be a preacher?" asked Joe. "Why don't you become a union leader or a lawyer?"

"Because the church," he said, "is the only free place the Negro has in the South. You can't talk freely at a political meeting or at a union meeting. But you can in

church. I want to talk to Negroes freely. The whites can't come into the church to lynch preachers or put them in jail."

4

There seemed to be one political issue in the state—graft. Candidates announced their aspirations to public office with a uniform slogan: "I will not take graft."

New Orleans people referred to their Mayor as Bob "Redlight" Maestri; it was stated openly that he owned houses of prostitution in the city. Only occasionally did people get together to pin the politicians down to concrete issues. Young Frank Chavez, secretary of the Progressive Democrats, was one of these people.

In a small and dimly lit French restaurant, we tasted the pride of New Orleans—Creole cooking—and listened to Frank explain the sour and corrupt set-up of politics in Louisiana. "Carpetbaggers," said Frank Chavez, "were called racketeers by Louisiana historians." But the carpetbaggers had nothing on the current political crew in office.

"Maestri was never elected by the people of this city," declared Frank. "Governor Long, Huey's brother, called off the scheduled election and appointed Maestri. He said there was no sense in spending money for an election when Maestri was sure to win."

He told us more: "The State Charity Hospital had been completed when some of the politicians decided to move it so that the contractors could get more work. They moved it twice, finally placing it next to the gas tanks. It sank because of the cheap construction materials. They propped it up with boards and planks. One scandal after another followed. There weren't enough beds, and patients with different

diseases were put together in one bed. Others were made to sleep on the floors and in the hallways."

The Progressive Democrats, Frank explained, advanced a program for clean government, social security, a state public works program to meet the slack created by the federal layoffs on WPA, seed and crop-loss aid to the farmers, and against the infamous "Leche money," the name given to the sales-tax tokens.

"To buck the machines is a pretty tough job," Frank continued. "You see, they continue Huey's practice of holding signed and undated resignations of every public officeholder. Whenever an official does something they don't like, they put a date on the resignation and turn it over to the papers. That's the first he usually hears of it."

Politics in Louisiana certainly seemed to match the murky, unhealthy atmosphere.

The rains came during our last few days in New Orleans. The hot sun shining through the murky air would suddenly disappear and the clouds would send down warm showers. Then the sun would come again and the air would grow thicker. Our bodies dripped with moisture. Here the hospitals were full of tuberculosis cases, and thousands more walked the streets with it. Our clothes would become soaked, and light drafts would make us shiver. We all caught colds. In the early afternoon, the malaria mosquitoes would come and we would squirm and swear, until we ached to leave New Orleans.

We needed money to leave, and in order to get money, we had to buckle down to our typewriters and send more material to the magic office in New York City, where a man would read what we wrote and send us checks for it. We divided our forces: Joe and Lillian stayed in the hot, sticky

cabins over the typewriters; the others saw more of New Orleans.

Helen found out about college students in New Orleans. We had read in the papers that 400 students at Newcomb College, practically the entire student body, had signed a petition with the slogan: "NO WAR FOR US."

And Helen talked with Miss Wisner, head of the Social Work School at Tulane University, about college students.

"Our hope today," said Miss Wisner, "is the younger generation coming to the school of social work from all the Southern states."

When Helen told her how New Orleans depressed us, Miss Wisner defended her city vigorously. "It's not that bad," she said. "We have one of the best Negro hospitals in the South here. Invaluable work is being carried on in the medical centers on tropical diseases. Of course, many things haven't been developed yet—public recreation for one, and housing for another. But really, the place has its good points. . . ."

One night some friends of Tim's agreed to put up Joe and George for the night and help us save on rents. We all walked through the French quarter, looking for the address. Down Royal and Bourbon Streets and over to Jackson Park, we passed the oldest apartment houses in North America, still standing. Street lamps illuminated shadowed and shuttered doorways. Once a bright ray of light broke through as a shutter was pulled up and a feminine voice asked:

"Doing anything tonight, gentlemen? Cheap. . . ."

Cheap. Decrepit, French-styled homes with rusty and sometimes freshly painted iron balconies lined the narrow, crooked streets. At the dim south end of Bourbon Street, we stopped to stare at the Saint Louis Cathedral, its tall

spires reaching magnificently above the historic slums. The small statue of Saint Louis in the garden at the front entrance threw a giant shadow on the wall of the cathedral.

We found the old French house where Joe and George were to stay. That night they slept in the old slave quarters in the backyard. Chains bolted to the thick cement walls lay across the floor. Light and air came through (or did not come through) a small opening about the size of a child's head near the ceiling. Washing and toilet facilities were at the end of the yard.

The morning mail brought the results of the "Bring Wershba Back Campaign." Joe's school chums had collected pennies and nickels on the campus; the campaign was going strong, and they sent us enough money to take us to Memphis. We never felt happier to leave any city.

Only one thing could ever bring us back to New Orleans—the *cassata*. We had discovered it when we had dinner one night in an Italian restaurant. We might call it "ice cream cake" (translation not literal). It was made of smooth vanilla ice cream on the rim, an intriguing layer of frozen whipped cream flavored with pistachio and sprinkled with nuts. A section of creamy ices lay at the bottom, strewn with chopped cherries, and a big slice of fluffy cake held it all.

If we ever return to New Orleans, the *cassata* and only the *cassata* will be the cause.

We sped toward Jackson over wet roads at seventy-five miles an hour, past cotton fields, past small plots of green grazing land, past the new consolidated school building surrounded by broken-down huts. Mel pushed down on the gas pedal as we all strained toward the state of Mississippi. Every once in a while a large white colonial house on a neatly combed green lawn would break the repetition of cotton fields and desolate shacks.

As we came into Brookhaven, Mississippi, we noticed a long, red-brick building with the name of a Northern garment firm. At a corner luncheonette, the counterman told us about the factory as he prepared five hamburgers. "They came from New York a couple of years back. Cheaper to manufacture clothes down here, what with low wages and the town so anxious to have them, giving them the place tax-free."

"How are chances for getting jobs there?" asked Mel.

"Well, she employs about six hundred people, but wages are so low you can't hardly make a living."

"Have they ever tried to organize a union?"

The counterman turned over the hamburgers and gave them a sharp slap with the skillet before replying. "Huh! Not in *this* town with *this* company."

He slid the meat patties between the buns and onto the plates. "Coffee?" We nodded. "It ain't Christian, the misery here. I don't know what's happening any more, hungry people, meanness all over the world, war in Europe. . . . It ain't Christian." He watched Joe wolfing down the hamburger in large bites. "I've got a boy about your age. When I think of him going off to war, I get cold all over. I fought in the last war, had to kill kids like you. Ah, I don't know." He shook his head and sighed. "I don't know as a man can really tell what's going on any more. The papers are full of this war, but you can't believe what you read. All I know is it ain't Christian to kill kids."

All talk now turned to the war. We might start on another subject, but we could not shake off the thought of war. We didn't want war. Other people didn't want war. But it was there and coming closer, and in the state of Mississippi, on top of all the suffering and poverty, was the fear of war, the hatred of a gun and a cannon. In Mississippi money

spent for armaments would keep families alive for years and build schools where the rate of illiteracy is the highest in the country.

A row of decaying wooden shacks a small distance off the road near Terry caught our attention. We stopped and kicked our way through the brush. From one of the doorless shacks, an old man with gray unkempt hair and a limp emerged carrying a pail. He nodded, and we started to ask questions. But the old man told us he had to go down the road a piece for some water for his wife and small grandson, both of whom lay sick inside. We peered into the shack. On a mattress spread on the floor lay an old woman and a child covered with a dirty quilt. The old man advised us to see Jess a couple of houses down.

Jess was huddled over the motor of a rusty Willard car. Three little girls wearing pink cotton slips had been watching their father intently, but as we approached they scampered into the house. Jess dropped a wrench, brushed his hands against his trousers and greeted us. He was about thirty-five, with a slow, easy way of talking and a heavy stubble.

Jess told us he worked in the near-by lumber mill and that his house belonged to the company. "We pay a dollar a week rent for it," he said slowly, his eyes fastened on his car. "Over at the mill we get a dollar and a quarter for ten hours work." He rested the palms of his hands on the fender behind him and leaned against the jalopy. "I've been thinkin' of pickin' up and leavin' for California. I hear there's jobs out there, but I don't know's I want to take the chance. I've got three kids now and one more on the way." The old fellow who had the sick wife and grandson sauntered over and stood against the back fender of the car.

"Half the people in the county would have just plain

starved without WPA. Sure thing," he nodded at our question, "the whites and colored work together on WPA. No, there ain't no hard feelin's. Why should there be? Colored have to eat same as white folks."

His three little girls came out of the house wearing dresses but still without shoes. When George adjusted his camera and asked them to pose for a picture, they started to run away. After a while they returned slowly, crept behind their father and peeked at us curiously.

The old man thoughtfully scratched his leg. "My son works in the other mill," he said, "but when the mill shuts down, he don't work. Some of the fellas over there wanted to start a union, and I told my son to go with 'em. But he won't do it." He scratched more vigorously.

"Unions are all right," Jess said slowly. "They tried once to start a union, but then some official came down and said there had to be one for whites and a different union for blacks. I dunno what happened to it, but they didn't get very far."

"How do people vote around here?" asked Mel.

"Most of the folks don't," replied Jess in his soft drawl. "They can't afford the poll tax; two dollars it costs. They can't afford to vote."

"That's right." The old man spat into the road, hitched his trousers and started back toward his own house. "Glad you folks stopped by, enjoyed talkin' with all of ya."

"You people writin' all this in a book?" questioned Jess.

"That's right," Lillian said.

"Wa-al, may be you can't understand this . . . but don't use my own name in that book. Jest make up a name. The company might get to know what we've said, and they won't like it." He lifted the smallest of his daughters on his knee.

"Can't tell what might happen if they know I told you all this."

We returned to our car, and Jess again bent over his old motor.

"You know," Helen declared as Mel drummed up the motor and drove smoothly into the heart of Mississippi, "I don't know how much more of all this I can stand."

"Suppose you had to live that way," returned George. "Suppose you were stuck right in the middle of it all and couldn't get out?"

"I'm not thinking so much of myself," said Helen. "I mean all of us, how much more of it can we take? Will everything be this way? In Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee . . . ?"

"And will people look at us the same way all over the South?" added Mel. "I know what Helen means—just the look in these people's eyes makes me feel low."

## 5

Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, is a typical American city—Sears Roebuck and Thom McAn Shoes, Greyhound Bus and Paramount Theatre, Walgreen's and Dr. Pepper's famous drink—all had come to Jackson to clothe, feed and entertain people the same way they did in New York and San Francisco.

"But Dot Horie, a friend of mine, came from Jackson," protested Lillian. "She's different. Jackson *must* be different in some ways."

Millstein's Department Store in the center of town looked different, so we caught Mr. Millstein as he was about to leave for the day. He was big and paunchy, and he chewed on a short cigar stump as he talked. "Fifteen years I've been here," he said, "and now competition is choking me. Chain

stores—all you see is chain stores. Years ago, when I came here, a man could start a little business and make a good living. Now the big chain stores are ruining our business." He shifted in his swivel chair, and a bell rang sharply through the store announcing closing time.

While Mr. Millstein was complaining to four of us about monopolies crowding him out of business, Mel sauntered down the main street of the city. "Peanuts, wet and dry! Peanuts, wet and dry!" A husky middle-aged man standing on the street corner pushed a bag at Mel.

"What are *wet* peanuts?" asked Mel.

"Peanuts soaked in salt water. I raise them on my farm and come into town evenings to sell them. Ain't much doing on my few acres." The husky farmer told this to Mel mechanically, not smiling.

"What do you do when you're not working?"

"I'm on a WPA road gang." He jacked himself onto the fender of a car and continued to shout. "Peanuts, wet and dry!"

"What do you think of WPA?" Mel persisted.

"It's okay. Peanuts, wet and dry! . . ."

"Did you vote for Roosevelt in 1936?"

"Say," the peanut vender roared, sliding down from his perch on the car fender, "who the hell are you? And what business is it of yours who I vote for?"

"I'm . . ." Mel began.

"What right have you got to go around and ask people about their own business? I've got a mind to call the police!"

"Well," said Mel weakly, "good-by."

We all met again and walked down the street looking for a cheap place to eat. We passed the Century Theatre with one entrance for "White" and a different entrance in the alley for "Colored." At the end of the street stood the state

capitol, the dedication carved in the stone: "To liberty, equality and democracy for all."

In a small restaurant we ordered twenty-five-cent dinners of fried chicken. "Do you know," Joe asked the pretty young waitress, "that school kids in this state have to buy their own books?"

The waitress, whose name was Sara, had run away from home when she was fifteen. "Don't feel sorry for those kids," she said. "How about all those who never get a chance to step *inside* a school?" She called over her partner, named Pat, who had run away from home too. Neither Pat nor Sara had ever started high school. Both had poor homes, no nice clothes, no opportunity to do what they wanted. So both had run away from different cities and ended up together as partners in Jackson.

Determined to hit Memphis that night, we piled into the car. The rain caught up with us again. About a hundred miles from our mark, we stopped for gas and coffee. The *Beer Barrel Polka* blared from a nickelodeon. We drank the coffee made with chicory, Southern style. Lackadaisically we watched a tall truck driver insert another coin in the nickelodeon as soon as the song had finished. Five rounds of the *Beer Barrel Polka* together with the bitter coffee sent us reeling back to the car where we fell weakly into the corners and slept. Mel drove steadily through the rain, on to Memphis.

At the Newspaper Guild convention, we had worn cotton buds with streamers reading "On to Memphis." We dug the grayish bedraggled buds out of our luggage and put them on our lapels. At midnight we reached Memphis, hired the first tourist cabins we saw and fell wearily into beds that were damp and warm from the weather.

In the morning the air was still heavy and murky. Slosh-

ing through mud puddles, we made directly for the post office. No mail. No money. We had seventeen dollars in our treasury, enough to take us to Nashville.

We consulted the NAMES book.

Harry Martin

*Memphis Commercial-Appeal*

Always talking about Southern hospitality

"Harry's reviewing the *Folies Bergère* at the Orpheum," informed the copy boy at the newspaper office.

"Let's buy a pack of cigarettes," suggested Mel as we left the building. George, Helen and Joe vetoed the proposal. Mel, backed by Lillian, insisted. He'd roll his own, but the cigarette machine had been broken back in Texas.

"No," said George, "in a democratic vote, your motion has been defeated by the majority."

Mel and Lillian got to the car first and locked themselves inside. "We don't move until we get cigarettes," Mel announced dramatically. "This is a lock-in."

"We're on strike," added Lillian.

The majority, aware of its democratic rights, circled the block and returned to find Mel, Lillian and the car gone. They walked toward the center of town and over to the lobby of the Orpheum where the two rebels grinned at them triumphantly. "We hid the car. No cigarettes, no car," said Mel. "Don't think I'm trying to belittle democracy. It's for the good and safety of the group that I get my cigarettes." The majority looked at his frugal waistline, about twice as narrow as when he had left. Every large city we came to, we weighed Mel, because he was the only one who was getting thinner. Now the majority weighed Mel, finding that he

had lost eighteen pounds since July 15. They relented and recast their votes for the cigarettes.

While waiting for Harry, we kept the lone ticket-taker company. "I'd sure like to go to New York," he declared. "I'd like to go to college and study to be an engineer, but—" he sighed, "I can't afford it." He was twenty years old. He would be eligible for a war. How did he feel about it? He coughed, a rasping shaking cough when he laughed, and started to answer the question. Finally he said, "I don't have to worry about that. They wouldn't take me to war. I've got t. b. I'm safe."

When Harry Martin came out of the show, he gave us some more NAMES, told us he had to fly to Chicago that night for a Guild meeting and hurried away to review two more shows. We began the search for some hospitality, but not finding any, decided to learn about politics in the state.

"Crump is boss of this town and this state," one of the NAMES, a schoolteacher, told us. She asked us not to publish the name, because she would lose her job. Huge outdoor signs over the city advertised Mr. Crump's interests as an insurance broker and investment manager but said nothing about his political activities. So the schoolteacher gave us that information.

Boss Crump had once held the offices of Mayor and Congressman from this district. Now he was the power behind all important offices in the state. Since 1905 he had won twenty elections. Later we were to read how he ran for Mayor, won the office and after two minutes turned over the job to one of his satellites.

John Rust lived in Memphis. His name had meant little to us until we began to hear tales from the cotton pickers about his monstrous machine. The inventor of the mechanical cotton picking machine was not at home, so we

interviewed his wife, a stocky black-haired woman about thirty-five years old. In a large room with two desks, we learned about the cotton picker. Pictures of Rust and his brother before models of their machine covered the walls.

Two million cotton pickers will be thrown out of work when and if the cotton picker is placed on the market on an extensive scale. The Rusts didn't like the idea of their invention putting so many people out of work; so they established the Rust Foundation, proposing to educate the tenants and pickers for other work. But the picker sold for \$2,500 with a tractor. Only the rich farmers, the big planters, could buy it. The big farmer could sell his cotton at a far lower price than the small farmer, because his costs would not include wages for pickers. Mrs. Rust spoke seriously to us. "That would tend to drive the small farmer out of business, and the big farmers would get bigger, growing into monopolies as they gobbled up more and more small farmers who could not afford to buy the mechanical picker."

Therefore, the Rust Foundation proposed to prevent all these dire results. It called for a diversification of farming so that the South would not be dependent on cotton alone. It proposed co-operative farms where the displaced pickers and tenants could work the land together or share the machine with each other. "But the only way we can ever solve this contradiction of a wonderful invention bringing such things as unemployment," concluded Mrs. Rust with a sigh, "will be when we have a socialist society. Somehow new inventions do all the wrong things in our present society."

Arkansas lay across the river from Memphis. Where the Wolf joined the Mississippi, a long, tall bridge spanned the water. We stood on the eastern bank and wondered what lay on the western side. The rain started again. River boats

laden with lumber, cotton and coal were anchored at shore. The levees along the bank recalled the floods we had read about in the papers.

Before leaving, we decided to visit Arkansas and add another state to our already large collection. Determining first that we did not have to pay a toll, we crossed the bridge and looked at Arkansas. Stevedores, like those in the state across the bridge, loaded river boats with cotton bales and large packing crates. On this side of the bank too, boatfuls of cotton and coal waited. Disappointed, we returned to Tennessee in less than five minutes.

The rain followed us through the state. Sixty miles from Nashville we stopped for hot coffee and sandwiches. We all had colds. The tea room looked cheerful and bright as we came out of the rainy midday darkness. The room was crowded and filled with talk and smoke. A heavy man, his hat pushed to the back of his head, and his equally heavy woman sat opposite us placidly chewing corn on the cob. Three truck drivers at the table on our other side were lunching over juicy steaks, cutting and eating noisily, and talking at the same time. "I still don't like this special session of Congress," the smallest of the three truck drivers said, between mouthfuls. "Once we start selling to them armies, we're gonna have to send our own armies over to collect."

We ordered cheese sandwiches and coffee. "Making up for the Civil War," grumbled George as he paid the exorbitant bill.

The rain came down harder as we pushed farther inland. We put on our coats and huddled together in the car. The dampness seemed to push our colds farther down our throats. We crossed the Tennessee River and came through squalid slums into smoky Nashville. We headed immediately for the Presbyterian Building, where the offices of the League

of Young Southerners were located. It was late Saturday afternoon. The office was closed. We had one other NAME in Nashville—Arthur G. Price, Jr. We didn't know who or what he was. We were broke in a strange city and had to wait for a check from our publisher. If this one NAME could not help us. . . . We called up and he told us to come right over. It took us about an hour to find the address. A young Negro boy greeted us eagerly. "Well, there are *five* of you. Come in." Arthur took our coats, led us into the large living room and introduced us to his father.

"All five of you from New York?" questioned the elder Price. "My! Have you had dinner yet? Well, do you like steak? I'll run out and get it while you wash up. Where are you staying? Why don't you stay here? We have a large house, plenty of room." Just like that were we fed and housed. We had found real Southern hospitality.

"Arthur," began George after we had washed and put on clean clothes, "can you tell—"

"Don't call me Arthur," said our young Negro friend. "Everybody calls me Peter."

"Okay, Peter, we'd like to know something about Negro young people down here. What do they do for jobs?"

Peter turned on the table lamp, for the room was growing dark rapidly. He couldn't have been more than twenty years old, yet deep lines had formed in his brow. He was light-skinned, with close-cropped hair and a slow easy way of speaking. He told us his father worked in the Negro bank, and that he went to Fisk University. Of the 150,000 people in Nashville, 50,000 were Negroes. "The Negroes work in the fertilizer plants and in the building trades where they belong to a union separate from the white union. They find jobs as porters and as teachers in the Negro schools. But they're not employed in the textile mills around here."

"Why not?"

Carefully he traced the rise of the textile industry in the South. When industry developed after the Civil War, both black and white workers were employed in the mills. "But the bosses didn't want the black and white workers to have any common ground for unity," Peter continued, "so they raised the barrier of color by hiring only white workers. Now they threaten the white workers with dismissal if the whites try to organize a union, and they say they'll replace them with black workers. In this way, they keep alive race hatred, because it's useful to them."

After dinner, Peter took us to the home of Professor Addison T. (Tuffy) Cutler, head of the Economics Department at Fisk University, a private institution where both Negro and white instructors were employed. We gathered around a roaring fireplace with Tuffy and his wife, Ruth, who looked like a college student—corduroy skirt, sweater rolled to elbows, anklets and saddle oxfords. Others who came over in the course of the evening included Lewis Wade Jones, Negro instructor in sociology, Dave Robison, the music librarian, and his wife Naomi, and Eli Marx, psychology instructor. Judge, the Cutler's Scotty dog, took up the last available inch of space in the crowded living room.

There was no color line here. We talked about it, but it did not exist in this room. We were a dozen human beings with common interests. And we felt, as we listened to Lewis and Peter explain the problems of their race, that we were learning for the first time in our lives about the Negro problem as a human problem. Back in New York, we all had been opposed to race prejudice, to discrimination against Negroes. But the "Negro problem" had been something in a book, a theory to talk about and understand. Now we

began to know the Negro as a human being, to find in Lewis and Peter the same goodness of all the new friends we were making throughout the country.

"I never rode on a streetcar," declared Peter, "until I was fifteen. My father was once insulted by a streetcar conductor, and since then he's never been on one. He didn't let us ride on them until we were old enough to decide for ourselves whether we wanted to or not. You see," he explained, "when whites get on a streetcar, they aren't supposed to sit behind a Negro. Once I was riding on a car, and a Negro behind me got off, leaving the only empty seat in the car. A white man got on and asked me to move back. I wouldn't do it. The conductor stopped the car and called a cop, and he told me to move back. I just got off the car. I won't move back an inch for any of them."

We talked late into the night and promised to come back to talk some more. Next day, Sunday, we went to the non-sectarian services at the Fisk University chapel. White and black sat side by side listening to the sermon on the brotherhood of man—"He that hateth his brothers is in darkness and walketh in darkness . . ."

In the course of the next few days, we did Nashville thoroughly. Tex Dobbs and Jim Anderson showed us the high spots—spacious Vanderbilt University, where we talked with student leaders about the League of Young Southerners.

Tex took us to the movies, and the Robisons took us to dinner in what used to be Andrew Jackson's stable. Peter Price invited us to a dance at Fisk, where a swing band kept us stepping with the students until midnight. White and black don't dance together in the South, unless they are on private property. Fisk was private property. We danced with Negroes as we had done with other friends at many

college dances for four years. We met students who wanted to be doctors, teachers, social workers, journalists and engineers. They didn't know what would happen after they received their degrees, but meanwhile they were studying and hoping . . . just as we had studied and hoped.

We liked the people we met in Nashville—so well that we decided to use the city as a base for our trip throughout the deep South. When our publisher sent another check to pull us out of Nashville, we said temporary good-bys to the Cutlers, Robisons and League of Young Southerners and headed down toward Alabama and Georgia.

As Helen got into the car, she ripped her skirt on the typewriter. We stopped in the center of town while she looked up a local seamstress, Mrs. Timberlake. Six middle-aged women sat about the small shop talking. A woman wearing a tall hat with an equally tall blue feather was saying, "I'd do anything to keep our boys in America. We can't let them die in another useless war. If all us mothers would get together and say, 'We won't let our sons be killed,' I bet they'd have to listen to us."

Helen asked her what she thought of the war in Europe. "You're a stranger here, that right?"

"Right," said Helen.

"I can always tell," said the lady with the blue feather, "because I've never seen you here before, and besides you talk different. Well," she cleared her throat, "let me tell you something. The biggest liars in the world are the Nashville papers. They make it seem like we was all taking sides in the war and wanting to help England. You can't believe what you read in the papers. Let me tell you, we mothers think different." She looked at the other women in the room, and they nodded.

The seamstress came over to help Helen with her skirt.

"Will you have your tail in or out?" she asked. Without giving Helen a chance to look at her blouse, she tucked the ends into the skirt. "You'd better keep it in; you're in the South now."

The lady in the blue hat and the others laughed in a friendly way as Helen hurried out to meet the others.

## *Chapter 10* "GOING AGAINST THE WIND"

☛ The deep South, the reality in the stretch of land between Nashville and Atlanta, knocked all our preconceived ideas into a cocked hat. It was not the first time that our ideas about our country and people had not jibed with the reality we saw and experienced. When we started out to discover America, we had an idea of the American farmer as a rugged, hearty individual working the land he owned. In most cases we found him poor and landless, a tenant or sharecropper or migratory worker. We had a concept of American opportunity for education and jobs, of the American standard of living, of American democracy. Everywhere we found unemployment. We saw homes without electric lights and toilets and beds. We remembered the faces of hungry people in Ohio, California, Texas. We found disease and illiteracy.

Back in New York people wrote essays and editorials about "hungry people." We wondered if they had ever seen them. The sight of hungry people had shaken us.

"Have you ever been hungry?" John Steinbeck had asked, and that thought was in our minds when we saw the hungry people in America. An idea of a hungry person was different from the reality, and we had never experienced the reality. We only looked at it. But looking and thinking made us wonder. Why didn't our concepts of America, the ideas we had gleaned from books, classrooms, newspapers, radio and the moving pictures jibe with the reality?

We had an idea that the South was a flat, sandy wasteland broken by large patches of cotton and swamps. What we saw of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana partly matched that picture. But Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama and Kentucky knocked the idea out of our heads. We found magnificent land, mountainous and forested and rich, equalling and often surpassing the beauty and wealth of the Pacific Coast states.

We sped in a direct line toward Birmingham. A thick blanket of green grass covered the round smooth Tennessee hills. Along the way we saw the "American farmer" and his family, standing near their rotting shacks. The men stood silently, their round, bony shoulders bent, their faces long and thin. Their wives held babies on their arms and stared as our new streamlined car passed by. Their children turned old wrinkled little faces in our direction.

Which was out of place in this beautiful area, the rich land or the poor people? At long intervals, a clean, white plantation mansion arose to match the wealth of the surrounding land. The main road took us close to these spotless colonial homes, but a narrow dirt side road took us behind the scenes cursory travelers view. Hidden from the main road, the real poverty and hunger appeared, the faces thinner and more despairing, the almost naked children sitting quietly on the green grass, the decrepit shacks even more decrepit. There

comes a point when any description of all this must take the form of comparatives and superlatives. The bad could be seen on the main highway, the worst lay hidden on the side roads.

Back on the state highway, Mel slowed the car as we came up behind two dozen cows jogging along at a leisurely pace near the Tennessee-Alabama state line. A young boy on a bicycle who was rounding them up and marching them home, maneuvered the cows off the road slowly and without concern.

The Alabama boundary line changed nothing in this panorama of contradiction, of natural beauty and depressing poverty. Cotton fields appeared. We saw the families at work—mothers, fathers, girls and boys—dragging faded gunny sacks thrown around their bodies as they moved from one plant to the next.

As we neared Birmingham, large mills and factories appeared, and signs announcing the T.V.A. dams dotted the highway. We had not expected to find industrial activity in Alabama, for our idea of the South had been cotton. We could hardly see the outline of the buildings through the smoke haze. A few people moved slowly and silently through the dark streets. We crawled past steel mills, slums and huge silent factories. A lighted restaurant across from the post office reminded us we had not eaten since noon.

Mr. George Kontos, as round as he was tall, owned the restaurant and served us himself. As we sat down to our meat and cabbage, he watched us with dark beady eyes set deep in his heavy jowled face, and told us his story. He was known as the "Lamb Bone King of Birmingham." A student of world affairs, his only guide was an old bone taken from a lamb. With this, he forecast the destinies of nations. On the wall in a black frame hung a newspaper article about

Mr. Kontos. It told how the Lamb Bone King had predicted the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Sino-Japanese war, the German annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

"Have you predicted anything about the war in Europe?" asked Joe. "Who will win?"

Mr. Kontos took his lamb bone and held it up to the light. Through the center of the marrow, he explained, he could see red spots, signifying war. "We will have to wait," he declared in his difficult English. "The lamb bone look like America go into the war." We asked how and why we would get into the war, and how we could keep out. Mr. Kontos didn't know; all he knew was what the lamb bone told him.

The next morning we rode around Birmingham. Slums seemed to make up half the city, ramshackle wooden houses, diseased and rotten. There were white slums and black slums, and the black were, as usual, a trifle worse than the white. Fire in one of these wooden shacks would destroy the whole area, black and white. The real-estate companies, we learned, maintained uniformly high rents on all these houses. They had fought all attempts to put up housing projects, and in one instance they had lost. The government housing project in the Negro section of Birmingham consisted of a number of pretty brick houses built in circular fashion to form a court. A recreation hall for meetings, dances and games adjoined the court. Rents for these clean, well-built homes were no higher than rents for the broken-down shacks.

"These gov'nment homes sure is nice," a frail old Negro lady told us as we surveyed the project. "Kind of hard to pay for, though. When we git work, it ain't so bad. But when we don't work reg'lar . . ." Her sentence petered out and she shook her head.

"Housing" had been an idea to us, an item in the federal budget, an appropriation to be replaced in a few months in President Roosevelt's budget by money for guns and battle-ships.

The NYA project in the Slossfield Health center was another such item. Here, on the site of a former dump, Negro boys and girls were building cots and chairs and weaving blankets for children in the neighborhood. The young people on the project had constructed bedrooms, kitchen, library and playroom for their own use. The girls were trained to do housework and the boys for general garden, maintenance and shop jobs. Many Negro families tried to get their unemployed children on the project, but there was room for only 250 boys and girls. "We try to place our young people in regular jobs," declared Mrs. Venice Spraggs, state-wide director for Negro NYA projects, "but it's terribly difficult. It's relatively easy to talk about education and culture, but I say we must support that culture by having jobs for our young people, both Negro and white." Then she told us how Jim Crow—the segregation of Negroes from whites in all public places—had received a strong blow in Birmingham when the well-known Negro band leader, Jimmy Lunceford, came to the city. Previously, Negroes had not been permitted to dance in the municipal hall, but the barrier was broken when Lunceford came to town. "I went to that dance," she recalled, her eyes shining. "It was magnificent. We had a real good time. It was really a great victory."

Mrs. Spraggs gave us the name of another leader of the Southern Negro Youth Congress in Birmingham—Hartford Knight. As we neared his office, in one of the main buildings of the town, a group of young men, both black and white,

approached us, singing new words to an old tune: "The CIO's in Dixie, hurray! hurray!"

Knight talked with us about Negroes in labor unions. Formerly a miner, he was the regional representative of the United Mine Workers of America. His short-cropped hair revealed a high forehead under tightly drawn skin the color of dark steel. "Of the 22,000 organized members of the United Mine Workers in Alabama," he declared in his strong deep voice, "half are Negroes."

"Are both Negro and white workers in the same union?" asked Mel. "People say you can't organize both in the same union."

"Which people say?" Knight smiled, lifting his eyebrows. "I know that's what employers say. Keep Negro and white workers apart and they can be played off against each other and never win any gains from the bosses. Well, the CIO showed them. We're six years old now. The CIO doesn't stand for any discrimination. We believe wages should be paid for the work a man does, not for the color of his skin. That's why the mines are almost 100 per cent organized in Alabama." Through the window of his office, high over Birmingham, we could see mills blasting smoke from the tall stacks to the sky. "Yes," Knight answered our question, "the mine companies are working at full production now, partly as a result of the European war. Steel mills now are turning out plenty more than they have in the past few years."

"Then the war has given impetus to production," said George.

Knight smiled, briefly, but not without bitterness. "Our members would like to see that coal and steel go for something better than munitions. We don't want to get involved in the war. You know what John L. Lewis said on Labor

Day: 'Labor in America wants no war nor any part of war.' Well, Lewis certainly expressed our sentiments there."

## 2

"It's Great To Be a Georgian!"

The Georgia Power Company slapped that slogan on signs throughout the state, from the city slum districts to the outlying fields of the sharecroppers. Behind the slogan we discovered things that made us wonder why it was so great.

Back in Nashville, Tex Dobbs had suggested that when we were in Atlanta, we look up the Georgia Fact Finding Commission, which informed the citizens about their state. The Commission studied education, religion, agriculture and the like, and the findings—sharp hard facts—were published. No Georgian should have been angered by the information. It came from committees of experts in all fields surveyed. The Commission, moreover, was backed by a large number of organizations, such as the Georgia Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Rotarians, Kiwanis, Lions, American Association of University Women, the Federated Church Women, Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the League of Women Voters. The findings ran something like this:

Education: Georgia spends less per pupil than any state in the union except Arkansas. Half the white pupils go through the fourth grade only. Half the Negro pupils go through two years of grammar school only. The school year is shorter for Negro children. Teachers in Negro schools receive half the pay of teachers in white schools.

Agriculture: Georgia ranks third among states in farm population, second in farm tenancy, thirty-ninth in gross income per farm. The per capita income of the average rural dweller is \$147 a year.

Religion: Georgia stands among the top states in church membership. Preachers' salaries and the value of church property average about half the national figure.

Politics: One-third of the population does not have the right to vote. One party, the Democratic, runs the elections. The poor, both black and white, can't vote because of the poll tax.

We found out about the Fact Finding movement from one of the persons engaged in the work, Mrs. Gershin. "I don't know whether you Northerners can understand," she said laughingly, "but if Yankees had made these same findings, the Georgians would have become infuriated. Southerners won't take criticism from Northerners, but they'll listen to other Southerners. Our Committee is composed of Southerners, and we're making the state take our criticism."

We returned to our car late at night, prepared to leave Atlanta. We found the handles on every door smashed. Evidently, someone had tried to break into the automobile, and failing, had wrecked the handles in vengeance. We couldn't unlock the doors. Disconsolate, we stood and looked at our car. A young Negro came down the street. "What's wrong, boy?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Someone tried to break into the car. Instead he broke all our handles," said Mel.

"Maybe I can help you," the young Negro replied. "I'm a mechanic when I'm lucky enough to get work." Picking up a piece of wire from the street, he formed a loop and tried to catch the inside handle.

A number of young white fellows gathered around. The mechanic was the only Negro present. One of the whites, thinking he had discovered the method to open the car,

tried to grab the wire out of the young Negro's hand. "Hold on a minute, boy," said the Negro, "I almost got it now." He had opened the ventilator and thrust his arm to the elbow through the opening. With a grin on his face, he turned his head. "You whites may be smart, but us black folks is wise."

The white youths laughed. We had heard a lot about animosity between black and white. But no arguments started. Working skillfully, the Negro looped the wire around the inside handle. He tugged hard and the door opened. The small crowd cheered him. "Nice work, boy," a white youth remarked as he patted the Negro on the shoulder.

George dug into his pocket and offered some money to the mechanic who accepted with thanks. We climbed into the car and headed north toward Chattanooga. "I think that business about Negroes and whites hating each other naturally is a lot of hokum," Mel said quietly, as he looked straight ahead at the road.

At two o'clock in the morning, we reached Calhoun, Georgia, found a tourist home and woke the landlady. Good-naturedly, she showed us to our rooms. Next morning, she woke us. "You young folks better get up. Your breakfast will get cold."

Over the eggs and grits, she talked about her work. "It's kind of hard makin' both ends meet," she said. "It takes a lot of money to send two boys through college the way I'm doin'."

"This looks like a tremendous house," said Joe as he struggled to down a large mouthful. "Was it built especially for tourists?"

The landlady laughed. "No, indeed. This used to be a plantation house from the old days, before the War."

"Do people still talk much about the Civil War?" asked Mel.

"Quite a bit, mostly the old folks though. Have you read that book about the South, *Gone With the Wind*?" She began to gather up the dishes. "Now there's a fine book, shows you the way the South used to be in the good old days. The people who used to own this plantation house—they were rich folks—used to tell me when I was just a little girl how the War destroyed everythin' that was good in the South." She sighed. "War always destroys good things. It looks like they're startin' a real war over in Europe now." She shook her head slowly. "I don't want to see my two boys go to war."

We left Calhoun and sped north. Cotton bedspreads, aprons and tablecloths began to appear strung out on lines. We stopped at a small shack near the roadside. A line of bedspreads stretched from one end of the house to the other. Inside, a boy about thirteen stood behind a rudely rigged-up counter. He told us he took care of the "stoh" while his father and mother worked in the near-by cotton mills. His name was Lee. School closed early so that Lee and other children might help their parents. Lee also looked after the adjoining one-acre cotton farm. His parents together earned less than ten dollars a week in the mill. His thin pale face had brightened when we entered. "I'm sorta gen'l manager 'round here," he said. "D'ya wanta buy some stuff?" We bought some aprons and a jacket. The bill totaled \$1.25. "That jacket would cost three or foh' dollahs up No'th," the lad told us.

Into Chattanooga, Tennessee—"city above the clouds"—we rolled. Huge signs on the roadways marked the paths to the sites of the famous Civil War battles. Now only peace seemed to rule over the bronze-colored Tennessee

hills. History had to be bought here; the battlefields could be seen only by those with the price of admission.

We drove steadily north. A mile out of the small country town of Monteagle, we came to a large farmhouse which had been converted into a school. Set deep in Tennessee hills, almost hidden by thick trees, this was no ordinary schoolhouse. It was the famous Highlander Folk School.

The term was finished when we got to Highlander, but a few of the teachers and students were still there. They showed us around the big farmhouse—a comfortable library with thousands of books, a big eating hall, a clean well-equipped kitchen and rows of cots in the mountain-aired dormitories. From all over the South, from San Antonio to Lexington, Kentucky and up to High Point, North Carolina, labor unions sent their members to Highlander. The school taught workers how to organize unions and become leaders.

"We were expecting you," said Bill Buttrick softly. "We heard you were traveling around and expected you to drop in." He was young, slender, soft-spoken. He had studied at Asheville, Duke and Brookwood Labor College, and now he taught at Highlander. Others who welcomed us included Claudia Lewis, the nursery-school director, who had come all the way from Oregon; Mary Lawrence, a tall girl with a shock of blonde hair that kept falling across her forehead, a graduate of Duke and now a Highlander community worker; pretty Rosanne Walker, a Vassar graduate, who was studying trade unionism.

"You sort of surprised us," said Rosanne. "We thought you might be Dies Committee investigators."

"Has he been around to bother you?" asked Helen.

"Sure. His committee workers didn't announce them-

selves though. They just snooped around looking for 'reds' and of course finding everything we do is 'red.' "

"That's because we're developing some of the finest labor leaders in the South," Bill explained. "Dies is just a front for the bosses who hate labor unions. He does the smear work for them."

These were the people we had once seen in a moving picture called *People of the Cumberland*, showing the activities at Highlander. It was a new type of school, where students attended informal classes and discussed their problems under the leadership of an instructor. Besides going to regular classes, the Southern workers also had the opportunity to visit union meetings near by. They studied music as well as picket lines and spent plenty of time folk dancing, hiking, playing baseball.

"But why a school only for *Southerners*?"

Mary Lawrence laughed and threw back her head to keep the blonde hair out of her eyes. "You Northerners," she said, "must learn that Southerners want their own people telling them what's right and what's wrong. That's the main purpose of this school—to turn out *Southern* labor leaders."

And that was a major lesson we learned throughout the South. The rumblings of change from Atlanta to Houston demanded articulation by young and courageous leaders, *Southern* leaders. Most of those at Highlander were no older than ourselves.

3

Outside of Crossville, a group of brick farmhouses contrasted sharply with the shabby wooden shacks we had seen throughout the state. We stopped and investigated. Mr. Wakefield, an occupant of one of the pretty houses, showed us about. "We rent these homes from the Farm Security

Administration," he said. "We pay ten dollars a month rent. It sure feels good to be rid of our old worm-eaten shanties." Equipped with a large fireplace in the spacious living room, a refrigerator, a gas stove and electricity, the house was the city-dweller's concept of what life in the country ought to be like.

Mr. Wakefield looked around the room with an expression of mixed worry and satisfaction. "I'd sure hate to move out, but even that ten dollars is hard to pay when the mills shut down and I can't get work. Most folks roun' here go back to the Revolution." He grinned quizzically. "But sayin' your folks come from the first Americans don' help any when you try to buy bread in the store or when you can't pay the rent."

Late in the afternoon we reached Knoxville, a clean-looking college town. With a nostalgic twinge, we read the large posters announcing the football schedule. We saw the University of Tennessee, the buildings bounded by tennis courts crowded with white-clad players. Students in bright-colored skirts and slacks, blouses and jackets paraded in twos and threes across the campus.

A battered coupé packed with seven college boys pulled up alongside our car as we waited for a traffic light to change.

"H'ya, New York!" one of the students wearing a bright green sweater called.

"How's Tennessee going to do on the gridiron?" Joe called back.

"Rose Bowl for us!" the other responded gaily, as his tin lizzie moved forward with the change of lights.

"There they go again," Joe remarked, "always forgetting the threat of Brooklyn College's powerhouse team."

"Ohio U should be knocking them over this year," Mel said, gazing dreamily ahead at the road.

Soon, dense power lines supported by large metal poles began to line the roadside. Wires stretched from the power lines to small, infrequent farmhouses off the main road. We followed the maze of wires into Norris, a little city where we could distinguish the outlines of Norris Dam beyond. Although the dam did not equal the immensity of Grand Coulee, the finished product seemed to be much larger than the still incomplete Coulee back in the Northwest. Both would bring electrical power and irrigation to millions of people. Behind the massive spillways of the dam, tiny speedboats darted around in the river carrying cargoes of pleasure-seeking tourists. We could see where the huge rocky hills surrounding the dam had been carefully blasted away, leaving a basin to hold the river in check.

We went down into the powerhouse. In the anteroom of the lobby, two drinking fountains had been built into opposite walls. Above one fountain, the word *WHITE* had been chiseled in the marble. Above the opposite fountain was the word *COLOR*ED . . . at Norris Dam . . . built and owned by the government of the United States.

We stepped into the power room where a giant generator monopolized the floor space. The huge tank-like machine converted water power into electrical power for the farmers and cities in the area. Science performed these miracles for men. If men could achieve the greatness of a Norris Dam, could they not overcome the smallness of Jim Crow?

As we drew away from Tennessee, we expected to see Kentucky border signs. Instead we found Virginia. A little mile-long chunk of the state had got itself mixed up with its neighbors here. At a gas station, where ten-cent

cigarettes cost a dime, tax free, we bought five packs. This was the only distinguishing characteristic of Virginia.

"It would make us folks mighty mad if we had to pay some more taxes on tobacco," declared the station attendant, "seein' as how we grow so much of the stuff in this state. Even on that ten-cent pack you're payin' about six cents in federal taxes. How'd ya like to be payin' four cents a pack?"

Some towns in Kentucky reminded us of Price, Utah, and Kit Carson, Colorado. Wide streets, low-built houses, cars parked slanting toward the curb, and many idle men lounging on the corners gave a town like Middlesboro a Western air. Tourist homes, large colonial models on the outskirts of the town, supplanted the cabins of the West.

As we headed toward Harlan, we found ourselves in mountainous and hilly land. A few miles below Harlan we came upon a construction gang tearing down part of a mountain side. A pile of limestone in the middle of the highway halted all cars. Mel immediately went to sleep in the front seat while the rest of us threw stones into the stream far below. A dozen young fellows in khaki uniform watched us. One of them laughed as Joe wound up for a far throw. "You ain't a Brooklyn Dodger now, are you?" he called.

"Nope, but I'm from Brooklyn," said Joe. "You guys CCC?"

A blond-haired youth nodded, waving an arm in the direction of one of the mountains. "Camp right up there. It stinks; don't come there."

"Why'd you join then?"

"I was a miner. Guess all of us were. Nothing doing. We had to eat. That's why."

"So you joined the army," said Joe.

"Oh, no we didn't," replied the blond youth. "We joined the CCC, and that ain't the army as far as I'm concerned. My dad taught me how to shoot a gun, and I don't need no fancy officers showin' me how to kill folks. Only killin' I'm interested in is for my enemies. And right now I ain't got none."

"If they try militarizin' the CCC," another boy added, "I'm gettin' out."

By this time the road gang had cleared a passage for cars. We woke Mel and drove toward Harlan.

We knew something of Harlan and Harlan County's reputation. From the coal mines of Kentucky to the fruit orchards of California, from the news columns of the labor papers to the files of the *Congressional Record*, that reputation was "Bloody Harlan!"

We paraded warily down the main street, five abreast. We saw no women, and the men lining the curbs and lounging on porches stared at us sullenly. Harlan—scene of bloody encounters between coal companies and workers who tried to organize. Harlan—scene of long and bitter family feuds.

A large building with a sign on it attracted our attention: LEWALLEN HOTEL—WELCOME COAL OPERATORS. On the porch, three stout men smoking cigars sat tipped back in chairs, their feet resting on the rail. Across the way, a smaller building had a sign too: UNITED MINE WORKERS, CIO.

"Don't look now," George whispered out of the corner of his mouth, "but they're taking our pictures with a movie camera!" Slowly we shifted our gaze to the porch of the hotel. One of the men had a camera focused on us. Lillian cleared her throat noisily. "Well, where'll we go first, Lewallen Hotel or Mine Workers?"

George looked quickly toward the hotel porch, where the camera was still focused in our direction. "Uh, is it necessary to get *both* sides of the question here?"

"Certainly," said Mel. "C'mon let's talk to one of the fat guys first. Then we can see the union."

We wheeled around and walked straight toward the camera. The man who had been taking our pictures went inside as we approached. We halted at the porch of the hotel. The three stout men puffed on their cigars and looked at us without changing expression.

"We're strangers," began Mel, addressing himself to all three. "Can we get some information about this town?"

The three fat men rocked back and forth on their chairs. The middle one, fatter than the others, shifted the cigar to the corner of his mouth before replying. "Whad'ya want to know?" he asked.

"Oh, anything about the town. What sort of town it is, what the young people do. . . ." replied Mel slowly.

"You from New York? Says so on your car."

"That's right."

"There's nothin' here that's your business. We don't like outsiders poking their noses in our affairs." The fattest of the trio said this slowly without abetting the constant rocking of his chair. Then he stopped and stood up. The chair fell over. "Understand?" he asked quietly, his fingertips stuck inside his belt. The other two rocking back and forth watched us carefully.

We turned around and walked directly into the building of the United Mine Workers, CIO. George J. Titler, strong and steely-looking, restored our confidence. We found him in the hot and littered union office. He was the vice-president of the State Council of the CIO and secretary of the district. "That Lewallen Hotel is the coal

operators' hang-out," he said in a slight Scotch accent. "They don't like strangers coming into town. Afraid they'll organize the union. They take all strangers' pictures and keep them on record."

Coal miners, thin and shabbily dressed, crowded into the small office as we talked. We heard them telling the union officials about their grievances against the coal companies and asking whether the union had news of any jobs in the mines. Paul K. Reed, an international representative of the Mine Workers Union, sat near by, talking busily.

"The operators own the Lewallen Hotel," Titler added, "and they own all the newspapers around here. Two coal operators are the heads of the Republican and Democratic machines. The only things they don't own around here are the Union, Paul Reed and me."

"Do you have a lot of trouble?" Helen asked hesitatingly.

"Well, things have been pretty quiet," Titler replied. "We haven't had a killing in ten days."

"Ten days?"

"Well, maybe eleven."

We thought Titler was ribbing us in real cowboy style but the men in the messy office smiled at our ignorance. "Guess you kids don't know about the mountain gun-law we got up here," Titler said. "Someone in a family gets mad at someone else and before you know it there's a first-class feud going on and . . . well, someone's liable to get killed."

"You mean Hatfield-McCoy stuff?" Joe asked incredulously.

"Well, that was in West Virginia. Some of the Hatfields, three or four of 'em, are in the union now. They haven't been feudin' since they joined the union."

"But now you take the Balls and the Turners," one of the

men put in, "why, there's twenty-five Turners a-lyin' in the cemetery on account o' that feudin'."

"Undertaking is one of the big businesses in Harlan County," Titler continued. "There's a lot of hot-headedness in these mountains. Lot of moonshining goes on. Some of the stuff they turn out makes you blind. The rest of it makes you want to fight. Those mountain feuds last real long too. Sometimes ten or fifteen years."

Another man chimed in: "There were nine dead once't in the courthouse. Yes, sir! Just shot it out over a lawsuit."

"Does that hurt your union organizing?" George asked.

"Guess it does, in a way," the union leader answered. "Besides, Harlan's always been a haven for scabs. Miners in other states who didn't want to fight for the union used to come running down here. That goes back a couple of generations. Then the coal operators used to hire regular gunmen and strikebreakers. Lots of times they'd use guys from this area—fellows who were sent up for moonshining or killings. Many of them were indicted dozens of times and never tried. Conditions have changed for the better now. But there's still room for improvement."

The CIO was organizing in Harlan, despite the coal owners' terror. "Some of them are co-operating," Titler explained, "but others are bucking like a mule, trying to keep the clutches of the NLRB off them." He dug his fingers into the air mockingly. "Right now, the coal mines in the Appalachian area are up to capacity. But active union men are kept out in lots of places. The companies hire the mountaineers and try to poison their minds against us."

A few months before we came to Harlan, Governor Chandler had sent down the state troops during a strike, opened the mines and forced the men to go to work, in spite of the fact that union contracts were still in the stage

of negotiations. Then in July, the national guardsmen fired their guns point blank into the picket lines. Several men were killed, among them a national guardsman. Others were wounded.

The coal miners were men of hardy stock. Their ancestors were the English, Scotch and Irish who settled America. From North and South Carolina they came, pushed always toward the frontier, following the trail blazed by Daniel Boone.

"Now take a look at Alex Hampden there," Titler pointed to a young fellow who grinned, showing prominent buck teeth. "There's one of your original hill-billies," Titler continued. "He'd shoot you dead in your tracks if you crossed him and wouldn't think much of it." Hampden grinned again, his big buck teeth giving him an air of childish innocence. We thought Titler was pulling our leg just a little too much, but we didn't know for sure.

We returned to our car, looking back at the Lewallen Hotel. The three stout men still sat on the porch rocking.

4

Over the winding roads of Kentucky's mountains we returned, and by nightfall we had spent our last dollar for gasoline near Knoxville. Penniless, we drove again into Nashville.

Early the next morning we sat about Ruth and Tuffy Cutler's living room. Judge sat mournfully in the center of the room. Equally sad, Ruth and Tuffy sat on either side of the Scotty dog, and Dave and Naomi Robison flanked the five of us. We wanted to leave Nashville, but we had not heard from our publisher. Our car needed two tires, and we needed money before we could leave. So we worried, and the Cutlers and Robisons helped us worry.

"Well, let's wash the car," Mel suggested. "No sense in sitting around." The car hadn't been washed since we left Los Angeles. We all tripped after Mel, following his directions. After working three hours, we had our pride and joy spotless inside and outside. We were all ready. . . . Then it started to rain, and we had no place to shelter the car.

"That settles it," Lillian muttered. "I'm going to call up our publisher!" She headed for the Robison's house across the street.

"No," said George, "it's not fair to do a thing like that to the Robison's telephone bill."

"Reverse the charges," suggested Helen calmly.

"Person-to-Person call . . ." We had \$3.25 worth of time to relay our message. "Hello?" said Lillian in a shaking voice. "Yes, we're all right . . . but stranded again . . . another fifty dollars . . . two tires . . . all we've got left are some tax tokens . . . by airmail today? Swell! Thanks! . . ." We all relaxed. "Uh . . . by the way . . . sorry we had to reverse the charges on this call. . . ."

Before reaching the Virginia state line, we came upon a dingy black truck. Through a small iron grate in the rear door of the truck, arms with black-striped sleeves hung out. Black and white faces peered at us from behind the bars. Helen smiled and waved to them. They just stared back at her. Then a young Negro smiled and waved back, and the others followed suit vigorously. More faces appeared at the opening to see who was waving at a chain gang in the South. We drew alongside the truck and passed it. In the front a shriveled driver hugged the wheel. Next to him sat a paunchy, hard-faced guard, cigar drooping from his lips, with a rifle propped upright between his knees. It was not a movie scene. There were no cameras.

We drove swiftly, entering the Shenandoah Valley, heading away from the South, to the land where *Damn Yankee* was two words instead of one. The Valley was like a scene in technicolor.

It was Friday, October 13. That should have made us cautious, but we were less than five hundred miles from home and didn't want to be sensible. Near Blacksburg, a young boy in a uniform asked us for a ride. We had sworn off hitchhikers since we brought Bob Stone to his Uncle in Stockton. It had been a case of talking with hitchhikers or disabling our car, and we needed the car. But this one was different; he had a uniform. Besides, we would be returning the car in a few days to Gladys. He was standing on a corner, holding a duffle bag in one hand and asking for a ride with a free thumb. We stopped the car, piled the basket from Mexico with the breakable pottery on Lillian's lap, and called to him. He tipped his cap, revealing a close military trim, and squeezed into the rear seat.

"Jimmy Ball's my name," he said. We told him ours.

"What school do you attend?" asked Helen politely.

"VPI—Virginia Polytechnic Institute."

"Oh! Brother Rat!" We knew our movies.

"No," he frowned, "you're thinking of VMI in Lexington. They're our rivals. Their uniforms are all gray—all for the South. We're half and half, dark blue jackets for the North and gray trousers with a dark blue stripe for the South. You know, when Rats come to VPI or VMI from the North or from the East, the upper classmen ask them: 'Mister, who won the Civil War?' And they have to answer: 'The South,' or else!! I'm not a Southerner myself; I'm a Westerner, born in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I guess that's why I'm a liberal."

He explained that his fellow students called him a liberal

because he talked about politics. We wondered how a military student felt about the war. "I'm really against war," Jimmy replied. "I want a job when I get out of school. I'm not taking military to learn how to kill other people. I want to be a chemical engineer."

He removed his trim military cap and took a pack of cigarettes from it, after which he replaced his cap. Offering the cigarettes around, he continued, "My uncle's a major in the army. Ever since I can remember I've been going to military schools. But just because a fellow goes to military school doesn't mean he wants to be a soldier."

George drew out a union songbook given to us at the Highlander Folk School. We began to sing the words written to the tunes of old ballads, hymns and spirituals. Jimmy knew some of the tunes and helped us sing.

"Unions are okay, I think," he answered in reply to our question. "People have the right to go on strike and organize for better wages. I'm not in favor of all this labor violence."

At six o'clock in the evening we reached Lexington, home of Jimmy's rivals, VMI, as well as of Washington and Lee University. By this time we were firm partisans of VPI. We walked down the street six abreast, our arms locked, singing at the top of our voices the VPI battle-cry:

*Oh, we don't give a damn  
For the whole town of Lexington!*

Jimmy insisted that we all have ice-cream sodas "on me." We accepted. We appropriated the whole counter and clinked our glasses in a toast to VPI.

We entered Washington on a bright, cool and shiny day. Our capital was a mass of white stone buildings, a city of activity and importance. But behind the cold stone lay the

government of, by and for the people we had seen during the past three months. We hurried over to the buildings under the Capitol Dome—Congress. Here the representatives of the Eddie Wagners, Herb Marches, Bert Fosters, Ted Langs, Clara Walldows, Ray Tillmans and millions of others were supposed to voice the needs and wishes of the people. Everything we had seen and heard from Atlanta to Grand Coulee, from New York to Brawley, would be found within these white stone walls.

*War.* This was on the people's minds. *Keep out of it.* This was their desire.

President Roosevelt had called a special session of Congress to amend the Neutrality Act. The President of the United States said it was unfair to England and France to refuse them aid. In the newspapers we had read lengthy stories about the heated debates in the Senate Chamber.

The Senate was in session when we came to see the fireworks. The gallery was packed. Vice-President Garner, presiding officer of the Senate, was not in the chair. Six Senators were in the Chamber:

Rush D. Holt (D), West Virginia, was poring over a thick volume on his desk, completely uninterested in the discussion on the floor.

Arthur H. Vandenberg (R), Michigan, marched up to the presiding officer's dais and conferred with the person in the chair.

Robert M. La Follette, Jr. (Prog), Wisconsin, entered, stayed for a few minutes, left and reappeared.

George W. Norris (Prog R), Nebraska, was sitting with his head supported by a hand, his eyes closed.

Alben W. Barkley (D), Kentucky, was talking to the person in the seat next to his.

Ernest M. Lundeen (F-L), Minnesota, was speaking on

the floor, but nobody in the Chamber was listening. Only the spectators in the gallery leaned forward to catch his words.

The peace of America was at stake. People all over America were concerned and worried. The greatest deliberative body in the world—one Senator talking and the other five not even bothering to listen. Senator Lundeen spoke for a long time, saying over and over again that we must keep America out of war, recounting the war debts of the Allies to the United States, insisting that war loans would involve us in the European war. . . . His words echoed strangely in the almost empty Chamber. Ninety vacant seats mocked his plea.

A short plump Senator entered the Chamber. We looked at the "program" which the usher had given to us, describing the members of the Senate and their seats in the Chamber. We could not identify the newcomer, who had asked Lundeen to yield the floor. Lundeen yielded.

"Has the Senator thought that if we aid the Allies we might be able to get some of their possessions in the Western Hemisphere—say Bermuda or Labrador?"

The galleries sat up shocked. Talk of war continued; nobody mentioned peace. "Of course we've got to help the Allies win, because their fight is our fight." That was the tone of the discussion. People had told us again and again they wanted to stay out of war. The Special Session of Congress was revising the Neutrality Act to aid the Allies. Six Senators, all of whom had decided beforehand how they would vote. Next day, the newspapers carried lead stories about the "heated debate" in the session we had witnessed.

Sunday afternoon, October 15, we set out on the last lap

of our journey, from Washington to New York. We met the holiday traffic and moved impatiently and slowly toward home. Maryland. Two hours to get out of Philadelphia. One little black bug in a long, long string of little black, green, gray and blue enamel bugs. For two hours we fretted as we traveled at a snail's pace through Jersey City.

George struck up an argument. "Not another mile do I ride," he insisted, "unless you agree to drive me home!"

"Do you mean we have to take you all the way to the *Bronx*?" demanded Helen.

George was adamant. "All the way to the Bronx," he said.

Mel objected. "I'm tired. I can't drive all the way from the Bronx to Brooklyn tonight." He looked down at the speedometer which gave us credit for 15,150 miles.

"Why can't you take the subway?" asked Lillian. "I should think you'd want to ride in a good old subway again."

George had our last half dollar, and we needed it to get through the Holland Tunnel. "Well?" he asked.

"All the way from the Bronx to Brooklyn?" Joe groaned.

All the way. . . . We voted it so.

From the New Jersey approach to the Holland Tunnel we could see the dark silhouette of our famous skyline. A high tension held us, silencing all talk. Mel broke the quiet with a request for money to pay the toll for the Tunnel. With a loud sigh, George took out the now well-thumbed little notebook and wrote:

*October 15*

Holland Tunnel..... 50¢

## *Chapter 11* "WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"

☛ From Coast to Coast, and vice versa, we saw 15,150 miles worth of America. Maybe we saw the wrong things. Maybe we looked for shadows instead of the sun. But we think we saw America, and if we found shadows, it was because people like ourselves, from Lancaster to Seattle, were living under them. Yet the shadows did not obscure the sun. Our extracurricular course in America taught us to love our land and her people.

Our country was too good to be buried in books. Moreover, some of the things we saw were never printed in books, and we never saw some of the things the books printed. If we found shadows, we didn't have to look too much for them. The shadows were there. We couldn't help seeing them, especially those familiar shadows covering the five of us now, back home.

We want the sun to shine brightly over America. We have a stake in light; we fear the darkness of war and no jobs. The boys and girls we met in the migratory camps and on the street corners had that same stake, that same fear.

We were five who got a break. That made us different from the boy who asked for a dime near the glorious Rocky Mountains. We remembered the fear and humiliation in his eyes. We remembered because our fear was different only in degree; we had something and he had nothing at all. John Steinbeck later talked to us about this, and we felt it deeply. We knew we had a stake in common with 21,200,000 young people.

Thomas Mann writes long and fine-sounding prose to prove that the dignity of man is a precious thing. We think the dignity of youth is even more precious, because when that is destroyed or perverted, the dignity of man is broken from the start.

We were five who got a break that made us different from the boy who asked us for a dime. He didn't want us to feel sorry for him. Feeling sorry for yourself is not a pleasant occupation. He needed a break. Four million unemployed youths needed a break, not for three months, but a break that would last until they got a chance to grow old.

A blond youth in the Northwest had told us: "Either we starve or get killed in a war. That's a crazy reason to be born in the first place."

He wasn't being melodramatic. He was saying something we all felt. So we five got a break. A warm-hearted publisher gambled on us with enough money to take us around the country. Newspaper Guildsmen, a Southern youth leader, a star reporter, a young Negro waiter, a political figure in Seattle—hundreds of people in thirty-six states helped us by talking, explaining and arguing, feeding and housing, giving us our break. Some of them we'll never see again. Others have become our friends.

But our stake is with the 21,200,000 youths in America

who need jobs instead of guns. We came home knowing this.

A famous newspaper columnist met us and said: "The trouble with you young people is that you haven't got enough self-confidence." We started to protest, because actually we think we're pretty good. Immediately the columnist, who makes a living coining puns, witticisms and terse bits of sophisticated philosophy, said: "I know, I know. Self-confidence is based on achievement, not possibilities."

We don't know whether he really meant that, but our look at America proved it for us. We saw a country full of immense and wonderful possibilities, but we saw too many people without self-confidence, without the dignity of youth. Human beings must be appreciated, must be given a chance to achieve and give something to America; otherwise they can't even bluff their way into self-confidence. We felt that we were living in a century of unlimited possibilities. Anything could happen. But could we make the good things happen?

Maybe we saw too many shadows. Maybe if we had disregarded the shadows, we five would have a better chance for "success." If we forgot the automobile workers' picket line in Cleveland or the two young boys in the Visalia Migratory Camp or the attack on the Communists in San Antonio, our trip might go over in a big way with some influential editors. We know some people don't like too much truth.

But we remember the face of the woman in the baggy green sweater carrying her baby on the Cleveland picket line.

We remember the thin, long-haired children sitting on

the curbstone, their bare feet resting on the hot road in the Pennsylvania mountain town.

We remember Herb March, black-eyed leader of the packinghouse workers in Chicago, who had been shot by thugs . . . the reporters and advertising men striking against Hearst for ten months, twelve months, fifteen months . . . the sprawling Carnegie-Illinois steel mill . . . **EVERYTHING FOR INDUSTRY.**

We remember the goodness of Doug, the star reporter who wanted to live in Mexico . . . the two girls at the market in Kansas City who had different religions but were still good friends . . . the dead land in Kansas choking all life out of farmers and their crops . . . the grocery boy who never had a chance to go to school . . . Mayor Scott drinking Coca-Colas and expounding the virtues of relief cuts . . . dark and chunky Ted Lang searching the skies for rain clouds, and his son learning to hate the Jews.

We still feel the power and hardness of the Rocky Mountains . . . the gold and purple and silver in the sunrises and sunsets . . . we remember the boy farmers learning to work the land together . . . and the eight hundred miners' families on relief in the middle of Utah.

We remember Heywood Broun, shambling to the rostrum in the Guild convention hall, as kind as he was big . . . San Francisco, the roller coaster town, where everything seemed to have life and energy . . . we remember wishing we might stay there and work.

We remember how we followed the Redwood trail and marveled . . . we still grow silent when we think of the tall thick trees in the night . . . the Washington Commonwealth Federation, with a constructive program for peace and jobs and old-age pensions . . . magic Hollywood . . .

John Steinbeck who talked and drank rum with us, who told us nonsense doesn't matter but people do. . . .

We remember the 200,000 landless farmers in California . . . the migratory camps that gave them a chance to breathe and to bathe and to talk about their troubles . . . Dan Harris who would never stop fighting injustice . . . coarse and contemptuous Clint Merritt who writhed every time a fruit picker ate one of his round luscious peaches . . . the Associated Farmers. . . .

The war in Europe started, and we began to hear the chant of the people . . . KEEP OUT . . . "It's a rich man's war and a poor man's fight," said young Evan who wanted to farm a piece of land some day.

We remember the miserable huts in Brawley . . . the drive to squash civil liberties in San Antonio, starting with little Emma, the communist, whom they wanted to put in a concentration camp.

We remember Malcolm Dobbs, the young minister who wanted to help thousands of young Southerners . . . the right to vote . . . the right to a job . . . the right to live . . . New Orleans, hot and sticky, corrupt and dirty . . . the bullet hole in the book-store window and the murder of the young seaman . . . Peter Price who opened his home to us . . . "It's great to be a Georgian" when mobs lynch Negroes, when the KKK rides to stop Negroes from voting . . . Bloody Harlan and the three paunchy men rocking on the porch.

These pictures are too vivid in our minds; we can't forget.

And we can't forget our beautiful country, a living and growing America, where the sun shines hot and the land is rich. We saw a wonderful people, kind and good to five strangers from New York. We learned that peoples don't

really hate each other. No, the shadows did not obscure the sun.

But we can't forget the shadows.

The fear of war and unemployment followed us back to New York. We have a stake in light, a fear of the darkness of war and hunger. Our lives depend on this stake, on the defeat of the darkness. Because we saw that we were not alone, we fixed this stake on certain specific things. Whether we want it so or not, we know that politics and labor unions and the difference between war and peace are bound up with our stake.

We grew up on this trip. We learned disillusionment; but we did not become cynical. We discovered America, and we drew from its people the lesson that great things still remain to be done before the dignity of both youth and man is victorious. Above all, we learned that this dignity is possible, because we became confident in the ability of the Eddie Wagners and Tex Dobbsses and Hartford Knights to achieve it.

Mel, the only one with a driver's license, lost twenty pounds in the course of this trip. But he gained something that cannot be measured in pounds—the realization that there were thousands of Mels in America.

Thousands of Mels, Lillians, Joes, Helens, Georges . . . in a land that is wonderful and tantalizing. Our country, we are sure, has the best in mountains and stars and ocean coasts, even though we have never seen more than the borderlines of another. Under those stars and on those magic coasts, thousands of people like ourselves feel the same things we do. That realization gives us reason for strength and confidence.

Thousands of Joes halfway through college can't buy new suits or take out a girl. The Joes face an old problem:

"Shall I try to continue with school or shall I try to get a job? How can I continue with school? How can I get a job?"

Thousands of Georges, trained for one thing, find themselves doing another, and their hopes and dreams begin to fade. Outwardly the Georges are full of fun and high hopes. Sometimes the fun is forced, because the hopes are dead.

Thousands of Lillians, their aims for a spot in the newspaper offices still unshaken, keep applying and plugging and punching. They repeat "it's going to be different with me," until they start to wonder if it's worthwhile. One year, two, three . . . until the punches grow feeble and often the count of ten is reached, and they're out.

Thousands of Mels keep pleading with bursars, quitting school and going back. They think of the girl waiting back home. Sometimes the furnace tending before classes and the waiting on tables in between and the errands at night get them too tired to think.

Thousands of Helens, wandering from job to job, still want to go back to school and get the coveted degree. Maybe it won't help, but then, maybe it will. And they go to all the agencies and contacts and people who might help, day after day, for a job, that's all.

But we had something else. A sure bet on our union, the American Newspaper Guild. An unshakable faith in the people of our country—we saw them with our own eyes—and their ability to achieve their rightful dignity. Proof that our country needs the 21,200,000, including ourselves. An idea—garnered from the Young Southerners, California Youth Legislature, Negro Youth Congress, American Youth Congress—of what we could do about it all.

That idea brought us back to Washington, D. C., on the week end of Abraham Lincoln's birthday, to the National

Citizenship Institute, where 5,000 young people from all over the country gathered to ask their government for jobs, peace, civil liberties. . . .

Tex Dobbs was there, leading hundreds of boys and girls from Tennessee, Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas and Texas. Lois Crozier, who had told us back in Hollywood that she would never give up her work in the Youth Legislature, greeted us with all the warmth and enthusiasm of her being. The little Mexican girl who had danced with George at the Celita Linda shindig in Houston, Lillian Miller from Cleveland—all the young people we had seen on their home ground. And the people we knew at home—Joe Cadden, round-faced leader of the American Youth Congress, Leslie Gould, who was writing a book about youth. Now they came, with us, to ask for the things we felt and needed.

In the pouring rain, we stood on the White House lawn waiting for the President of the United States to address us. A tall blond-haired boy, student at Union Theological Seminary, stood before a microphone. He was hatless, and his brown faded overcoat seemed all too short for his long lanky body. He was Jack McMichael, National Chairman of the American Youth Congress.

A few days before, we had read a newspaper story.

BRITAIN HINTS  
ROOSEVELT WILL  
SUPPORT ALLIES

OFFICIAL SAYS PRESIDENT WANTS TO  
JOIN CRUSADE; SEES U. S. IN WAR

Jack McMichael asked us to sing "America the Beautiful."

Our voices, 5,000 strong, echoed over the nation's capital.

"... and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!"

Then the young leader introduced us to President Roosevelt. . . . February 10, 1940, 12:30 P.M.

Deep in the dreams of Americans, Jack began, in his strong Georgia drawl, is the picture of a land of the free and a home of the brave. A land free of the misery of war and oppression, a people brave in their conquest of the social frontier. Toward the day-by-day realization of that dream, America's youth marches arm in arm with the rank and file of our citizenry.

Education, vocational training, employment at a living wage—for all, preservation of the civil liberties proclaimed in the Bill of Rights—peace—these are our simple aims. . . .

In this spirit, young people in thousands, from factory, farm, school and church—people with jobs, without jobs—have streamed into Washington at the call of the American Youth Congress for this Citizenship Institute. They are here to discuss their problems and to tell you, Mr. President, and the Congress, their needs and desires. America's twenty-one million youth are ready to fight—but determined to do their fighting at home—against indifference, intolerance and greed—for jobs, civil liberties and peace.

President Roosevelt gave us his answer.

He welcomed us with his inimitable smile, a cheerful cordial smile.

"Don't seek or expect a panacea—a grand new law that will give you a handout. . . ."

The crowd stiffened.

It was not long ago that we looked to President Roosevelt as our spokesman. In his opening address to Congress, he had said:

The unemployment problem today has become very definitely a problem of youth as well as of age. As each year has gone by hundreds of thousands of boys and girls have come of working age. They now form an army of unused youth. They must be an especial concern of democratic government.

We must continue, above all things, to look for a solution of their special problems. For they, looking ahead to live, are entitled to action on our part and not merely to admonitions of optimism or lectures on economic laws.

But to the 5,000 young people standing in the rain before the White House, President Roosevelt seemed to have forgotten this speech. He gave us a lecture on the statistics of his administration, on "economic laws."

He said he did not think "that your opportunities for employment are any worse today than they were for young people ten or twenty years ago."

He warned us "not as a group to pass resolutions on subjects which you have not thought through and on which you cannot possibly have complete knowledge."

He told us we couldn't possibly understand the intricacies of military preparations.

Silently, the crowd received the speech. Stunned, the boys and girls whose aims were simple—jobs, peace, civil liberties—disbanded in the rain.

"Don't expect handouts . . ."

We didn't want handouts. We did want help. The two girls at the Kansas City Market stall, Melba, the NYA

worker who had been named after a box of talcum powder, the sons and daughters of farmers who had been pushed off their lands to the strange cruel coast of the West, the wandering Iowa boy who could not find any work at home—they all needed help, but they never asked for handouts. Some of them had come to the nation's capital to hear the President while millions like them stayed at home.

All of us heard that conditions today were no worse than they were twenty years ago. What did this statement give to the thin grocery boy in Jefferson City who told us wistfully he wished he might have been able to finish high school?

On the afternoon following the President's lecture, the 5,000 delegates congregated in the Labor Auditorium to hear John L. Lewis. We gathered quietly, still shocked by the cold wet reception on the White House lawn.

The big labor leader leaned over the rostrum, his large head thrust forward, the thick long hair unruffled and bushy black eyebrows outlining eyes that seemed to seek out every individual in the hall. . . .

How many years, how many years can you stand to be without a job? And how many years of interruptions to your normal plans will you enjoy? How many years can you defer your projected imagination? How many years must you wonder and hope that you will have an opportunity here in your native land to live the normal life of a normal citizen?

His deep voice boomed out for more than an hour, not speaking down to us, but speaking with us.

The 5,000 stamped and cheered and whistled as Lewis voiced our own thoughts and feelings.

The President of the United States had told us any resolu-

tions we might adopt on the question of war would be "twaddle."

Dorothy Thompson, the successful columnist, was writing: "Either those kids are phonies or they're idiots." She was not worried about getting a job or going to war. But 21,200,000 were worried. Plenty worried.

. . . I wonder if the President could call the resolution adopted by the United Mine Workers of America "twaddle." . . . These resolutions are symbolic of what is in the hearts, not only of the young men and women of America, but of practically every citizen. They represent the constant and conscious and subconscious of present fears that, in some way, the politicians and statesmen of this country and the warring world will in some fashion drag our country into their war. . . .

The 5,000 young pilgrims shouted their agreement with these words. We five thought of the constant fears, the conscious and subconscious fears that had followed us back to New York from the little cottage in the Arvin Federal Migratory Camp near Bakersfield. There Fred Ross had announced to us that England had declared war. The cotton and peach pickers, the Mexican student whose cousin had died for Loyalist Spain, the cowhand in John Garner's home town, the efficient, hard-working Mrs. Duffy of the seamen's union, Hartford Knight and the lady with the blue feather in Mrs. Timberlake's sewing room—they all had the same fear.

And after all who has a bigger, greater right to protest against war or any part of war, or the diplomatic intrigues of war, or the subtle politics preceding war, than the young men who, in the event of war, would become cannon fodder?

I do not know what the future of the American Youth Congress may be, or what resolutions it may adopt. I wish, however, to give you this message, and I give it to you as Chairman of Labor's Non-Partisan League, not identified with either the Republican or the Democratic Party, but standing always for the rights and principles of free America, for the support of its meritorious institutions, for the preservation of the flag and for the protection of the homeland, and for a job and civil liberties. And while other people may be condemning you, and the Republican Party saying it doesn't want to associate with you, and the Democratic Party through its titular spokesman saying they doubt you know what you are thinking about, as Chairman of Labor's Non-Partisan League, I issue an invitation to the American Youth Congress to become affiliated or come to a working arrangement with Labor's Non-Partisan League in this country.

It is time for labor, it is time for the common people, and it is time for the youth of America to get together.

We stood and applauded the labor leader until the palms of our hands were numb. In the ovation given by the 5,000 we heard again the voices of all the people who had different versions of blond Ross's statement in Yakima Valley: "Either we starve or get killed in a war. That's a crazy reason to be born in the first place."

Eleanor Roosevelt was there, attending every session, often sitting on the floor of the crowded hall. More than one young person there knew her as a friend, a great and courageous friend. Over her knitting, she listened intently to the Missouri sharecropper, the young Negro tobacco worker, the New England sales clerk, the cocky Harvard

student. She disagreed with some of the things the 5,000 had to say. The 5,000 disagreed with her. But she was our friend. Unlike some of the politicians who used their disagreements as the excuse to heap epithets and abuse upon the Youth Congress, she voiced her disagreements with us. She stuck by us, and our common interests in jobs, peace and civil liberties grew stronger.

We knew that young people all over the country loved Eleanor Roosevelt. It was not sentimentality that prompted a boyish leader from the South to say he felt closer to Mrs. Roosevelt than he did to his own mother.

Then the name-calling began anew. Dorothy Thompson had named us either "phonies" or "idiots" because we were beginning to see a way to get the jobs, peace and civil liberties we were talking about.

Others called us communists and said if we were not communists, why did we not purge the communists from the Congress?

Frances Williams, poised and trim, gave her report on what the Congress was doing to defend civil liberties. She spoke in a low even voice.

Yes, there are communists represented in the Congress through the Young Communist League. And they are there, though in the minority, because they are part of the youth of the United States; they are willing to work to get better wages, jobs, and security for young Americans.

And because we in the American Youth Congress have a tremendous job to do, we welcome them along with the representatives of all youth organizations who would rather work for the betterment of American

youth than sit around wringing their hands or spouting long, pious phrases.

It is a curious fact, so it seems to many of our elders, fortunately not all of our elders, that youth actually does learn from history; and history in Italy, Germany, Austria and more recently in France and Canada, has taught us that the opening gun in the war on civil liberties has begun by outlawing the communists, suppressing their literature and meetings.

In this process, both in France and Canada, the next step, as we have seen too recently, has been the suppression of all groups (suspected of communism) and this includes the entire trade union movement, thus proving what we in the American Youth Congress have always maintained, that there is no half-way mark for civil liberties in a democracy.

Here was the answer of American youth to Clem Smith and Alexander Boynton of San Antonio who wanted to put the communists in concentration camps.

And what was to be the answer to war?

We sat in the Labor Auditorium, listening to the political spokesmen for the national government. Aubrey Williams, National Youth Administrator, who had said to us: "We'll tell 'em about the need of youth for more NYA funds," now gave us a grand talk on militarism. A few days before, he had turned over the lists of all young people on the NYA to the army for recruiting purposes.

He did not defend his act. He was proud of it. Young people, he said, should be glad of the opportunity to defend their country in return for everything the government had given them.

"I fought to make the world safe for democracy in 1917,"

he said. "The world *was* made safe for democracy. I'm not sorry I went to war."

The 5,000 laughed at him bitterly and coldly.

The war in Europe had changed our former friends, and youth, who needed someone to trust, began to look to labor.

As we five had looked to our union, the Guild, in San Francisco on a small scale, now all the girls and boys in Washington looked steadily to organized labor for help and leadership. John L. Lewis had shown the way in his speech. He talked for us. If labor was for us, we would be for labor.

And the slogan of the Maritime Union of the Pacific was repeated again and again in the Labor Auditorium. "The Yanks Are NOT Coming" was becoming youth's slogan.

The 5,000 drew up a peace message to the youth of the whole world.

Barbed wire is now strung between the countries of the world—barbed wire to hold back the power of common ideas, common needs and desires. But no barbed wire has the right to sunder our international fellowship, or to alter the great aims which we jointly treasure. Youth is not youth's enemy.

Thus we look with horror upon the inhumanity of those who by any measures seek to keep youth in the trenches or to drive the rest of us there. Some, under the banner of false moral issues, attempt to present the slaughter of youth as a holy crusade. These are the few who have never scrupled to set aside the needs of humanity in the interests of their own special privilege and profit. They sell the murderous instruments of war; they encourage the spread of war; they urge loans

and credits to warring governments so that a million wasted lives may replenish their coffers. They fill our press, they poison the air with their noxious hysteria. . . .

Heed our message, young people of neutral countries. Let us prevent the spread of this war, let us help our brothers out of the trenches—and let's not help ourselves in.

. . . Here and now we solemnly renew our sacred pledge to the youth of the world; we swear that we will not rest until the slaughter of our generation is stopped. The peoples want to live in peace and security. They shall not be denied.

We remembered how young Evan had looked up at the blue California sky, wishing for his brother to call for him to come and work on some land. "It's a rich man's war and a poor man's fight," he had said.

The youth delegates in Washington were speaking for millions of boys like Evan. And the American Youth Congress gave to Evan a program of action. We remembered how Evan didn't have an answer to George's question, "What are you going to do about it?" But the Youth Congress had an answer, for jobs, peace, civil liberties.

FOR JOBS: Campaign for the passage of the American Youth Act, introduced by Senator Elbert D. Thomas, Chairman of the subcommittee on Education and Labor. It was an Act for young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. It provided for non-profit works projects for which youth would be paid regular wages equal to the prevailing wage rates for similar work in the locality. It meant thirty dollars a month for students in colleges, five dollars a week for high school students.

It meant that the thin grocery boy in Jefferson City, Mis-

souri, could go back to high school and maybe enter a college instead of facing the grocery store clerkship for a future.

The Act provided for *jobs* for Nelson Dallas, for the Chicago boy who spent his last few cents on enough whisky to knock him senseless for a few days, for the two pretty girls at the market stalls in Kansas City, for the little Negro girl who stood wistfully looking at the jewelry counter in the Gary five-and-ten, for her friend who said, "A job is the thing you want most, and it's the hardest thing in the world to get." For Ross and his friends who owned nothing but a few tax tokens and an old jalopy. For Jimmy who wanted to go back to his native Missouri and work. For all young people, irrespective of sex, race, color, religion or political opinion. For the five Argonauts.

FOR PEACE: Campaign to Keep America Out of War that would reach the youth of other countries, that would penetrate the thick stone walls of Congress, that would make every individual with an "interest" or a "loan" or a "market" realize that this time we would NOT go. That's all, we wouldn't go.

But we would not wait until they tried to make us go. Already, we could see the results of the sharp curtailment of President Roosevelt's social security program. We never counted how many farmers and miners and migratory workers and factory women had said to us, "Maybe the gov'nment'll help." The government had not helped. The government had destroyed much of the help of previous years. We saw the results in the increased competition for jobs. And there were no jobs.

Now the government talked of increasing armament production to make jobs for people. But social security expendi-

tures were cut in the budget which President Roosevelt gave to Congress for the coming year. And then with the famous smile, President Roosevelt and Congress appropriated millions and millions of dollars for more uniforms and airplanes and guns—for what?

There are many things we didn't know. We didn't have many of the answers. But we were not alone in witnessing these steps. And the 5,000 saw these as steps on the road to war.

So the American Youth Congress and organized labor proposed a different road for America. In one terse paragraph we found the answer to the question marks on the faces of the little blond kids in the dirty jungle camps of California, of the pregnant sharecropper's wife in Louisiana, of the gaunt dry tenants in Tennessee, of the young Negro walking down the Mississippi road alone in the rain.

More expenditures for NYA, WPA, slum clearance, aid to farmers, health programs, public works and old-age pensions. Jobs on NYA meant a break for youth. Farm aid meant a break for all the bony men who tilled the earth. Slum clearance meant a break for all the people in the Hooverville hovels of the country.

Why couldn't the men who run our country give all these people a break instead of a grave in Flanders Fields?

The Youth Congress was not waiting until they tried to make us go to war.

FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES: In every community in the country the young people were establishing local civil liberties committees to guard against all attacks on Constitutional rights. In San Antonio they would keep an eye on the Boyntons and the Smiths. Little Emma had a right to speak. If her voice were silenced youth's might be next.

This was our future, and we who had got a break, found the way to a bigger break, not for five, but for 21,200,000.

"Provinces and nations can be signed away, but youth and honor never." The real La Pasionaria had once said that to the people of Spain. We thought of it as a testimonial to the 5,000 who had come together in Washington for the Citizenship Institute.

We came home. On a cold winter night we stood on Times Square near a newsstand. The lights sparkled from the ribbon of news flashing around the Times building. The bright chewing gum and cigarette ads and the huge moving picture marquees seemed to glow warmly down on us.

People pushed and crowded impatiently in the hurry of reaching some important destination. Not even the high and mighty stone skyscrapers broke the sharp wind as we stood shivering in front of the newsstand.

#### NEWSPAPERS FROM OTHER CITIES

The white letters on the blue sign covered the front of the stand, behind which were fixed miniature replicas of the trylon and perisphere, symbols of the New York World's Fair. This was Broadway and Forty-sixth Street, crossroads of the world. Another sign on one side of the stand announced foreign papers in blue letters on a bright orange background.

England

Ireland

Scotland

France

Belgium

Switzerland

Scandinavia

Holland

Russia

Roumania

"On accounta da war," informed Charles Lerner in earmuffs and heavy frayed overcoat as he stamped about to keep warm, "we don't handle foreign papers anymore." He had worked at the stand for six years and knew his business. "I'll tell ya what it is. Ya see, dere's a risk bringin' foreign papers over here. French, English, Goiman papers are not retainable. Suppose a ship sinks on da way over here?" He shrugged. "We lose money." He began to restack a batch of papers on the racks. "Besides, a lotta dose papers don't come out anymore. Ya know what happens in a war."

A pretty blonde girl, hatless and wearing a thin reversible sport coat, came over to the stand. Lerner gave her a paper, and she walked quickly away.

"Reg'lar customer," he said. "She buys a paper every day from up North."

We looked at his stock. *Houston Chronicle*, *Birmingham Age Herald*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Kansas City Star*, *Chicago Tribune*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Pittsburgh Press*.

Price three cents at home, seven or ten cents in New York. Every paper carried banner headlines on the war, the same as the New York papers.

But a well-furred lady came up and bought a *Boston Daily Record*, and a tall middle-aged man the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and a thin boy in spectacles the *Chicago Tribune*.

"I know," said plump, blonde Adele Kruse in a bright blue coat. She was eighteen years old and a native of Boston. "But I like to read news from home, any old news as long as it's from home." She had come to New York to go to nursing school. "New York is all right, but I like Boston better."

Another young girl, with sunken cheeks and bright eyes

in a sad pale face, bought a *Caledonia Record* from St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Her father mined marble up there. She had come to New York to try to find a job. No luck yet.

We walked down Broadway. From all over America people came to our town seeking what could not be found in their own. But their cities and towns and tiny villages had a precious something they would never find in New York. They bought their hometown papers for the "news from home."

That's the way we had found America. The things in the banner headlines touched the lives of all the people, giving them common interests, big interests in jobs, peace and civil liberties. Yet America was a land of a million differences in priceless Lancasters and Kit Carsons. People lived and died there, doing all the little human things that never made the headlines but made people good and exciting. We want to see the sun shine brightly all over this wonderful America of Lancasters and Kit Carsons. On Forty-second Street we passed a tall cowboy in a ten-gallon hat and high boots who was purchasing a ticket for the "French Follies." We entered the subway and bought early editions of the next morning's papers.

We rode home, reading the HELP WANTED ads.

## FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE ARGONAUTS

Revenue			
<i>Revenue</i>			<u>\$859.40</u>
Expenditures			
<i>Car</i>	Down Payment	\$100.00	
	Gas, Oil, Grease	175.15	
	Tolls, Parking Fees	5.95	
	Conditioning, Repairs	39.75	
	Tires	16.55	337.40
			<u>337.40</u>
<i>Food</i>			266.57
<i>Lodging</i>			111.00
<i>General</i>	Cigarettes	\$20.46	
	Literature (newspapers)	7.60	
	Telephone & Telegraph	10.26	
	Postage	10.70	
	Carfares	11.50	
	Entertainment	8.40	
	Camera	2.64	
	Freight Charges	10.06	
	Medication	34.25	
	Drug Needs	8.00	
	Laundry	8.45	
	Miscellaneous	12.11	144.43
			<u>\$859.40</u>

## SOURCE OF REVENUE

Publisher		\$300.00
Publications:		
	<i>Nation</i>	\$30.00
	<i>Hollywood Tribune</i>	15.00
	<i>Kern County Labor Journal</i>	15.00
		<hr/> 60.00
Newspaper Guilds:		
	St. Louis	\$ 9.70
	New York	100.00
	Seattle	10.00
	San Antonio	3.25
		<hr/> 122.95
Contributions by Friends		50.00
Loans by Friends		25.00
Raised at Party—net		9.45
“Bring Wershba Back Campaign”		8.00
Individual Contributions:		
	Helen	\$100.00
	Lillian	31.00
	Mel	47.00
	Joe	36.00
	George	70.00
		<hr/> 284.00
		<hr/> \$859.40

## VITAL STATISTICS

Number of days on trip	92
Average cost per person	\$171.88
Average cost per person excluding down payment on car	151.88
Average cost per person excluding car expense	104.40
Average cost per person for one day, excluding car expense	1.13
Average cost for a night's lodging for one person	.50
Average cost for food per day for one person	.54

Average number of cigarettes smoked in one day per person	7
Average cost of running and maintaining the car, tolls, parking fees, tires, etc.	\$.015 per mile
Average cost for oil, gasoline and grease	\$.0115 per mile
Price of gasoline ranged as low as \$.12 and \$.13 per gallon for regular and as high as \$.27 in the Rocky Mountain and desert states in the West.	

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## THE AUTHORS inside the Twentieth Century Unlimited

LILLIAN      GEORGE      JOE      HELEN      MEL

**LILLIAN ROSS** today can answer the question "Where Do We Go from Here?" She is working for New York's newest newspaper, *PM*. Born in Syracuse, New York, five months before the end of the first World War, she came to Brooklyn in 1932. Hunter College gave her a B.A. degree in June 1939. She is the American editor of the *Chinese Student*, Far Eastern magazine, and has written stories for other magazines. She played a leading role in organizing the associate membership of the Newspaper Guild and is now a full-fledged and active member.

**GEORGE WHITMAN** is now, one short year out of college, manager of *The Good Neighbor*, a small newspaper in the Bronx, where he was born twenty-one years ago. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the College of the City of New York, where he edited the student newspaper.

**JOE WERSHBA**, the 6' 2" "baby" of the group, was born in 1920. He is a junior at Brooklyn College, where he edits the *Brooklyn College Vanguard* and writes for the school magazine. He is a leader of the American Student Union and of the associate membership of the Newspaper Guild.

**HELEN ROSS** is two years older than her sister Lillian. After spending two years in college, she started working and has held jobs as waitress, store clerk, and secretary. She has written women's features for labor papers and is now on the staff of *PM*.

**MEL FISKE**, in spite of Chapter I, has married his best girl (with whom he attended Ohio University in Athens), and brought her to New York to live. He has worked as a reporter on the *Athens Messenger* and written magazine articles. Twenty-two years old, he won't give up until he finds a regular newspaper job.